



Calvinism's

FIVE POINTS CONSIDERED



The Five Points of Calvinism Considered

By

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Introduction

Calvinistic theology is usually explained by focusing on the five major Calvinistic doctrines, which are: (1) Total Depravity, (2) Unconditional Election, (3) Limited Atonement, (4) Irresistible Grace and (5) Perseverance of the Saints. All five points are more or less related to each other, so that one has a hard time accepting or rejecting one point without doing the same with the other four. They are easily remembered by using the acronym TULIP.

This particular study is a refutation of the five points of Calvinism. More specifically, it is a response to a booklet titled, *TULIP: What We Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism* by John Piper.

My purpose in writing is to clearly show where Calvinism contradicts Scripture and logic, and to challenge Calvinists to consider a different position. Calvinism is flawed on at least three levels: (1) by the focus on certain “supportive” scriptures and the ignoring of scores of scriptures that clearly contradict Calvinistic interpretation of the “supportive” ones (2) by unnatural and forced interpretations of certain scriptures and (3) by faulty logic that often contradicts itself. When we take the whole balance of Scripture, accept the most natural interpretation of what is written, and maintain a logic that is consistent, we do not arrive at the five points of Calvinism.

I hope that my comments are not taken to be against Calvinists, but against the doctrines of Calvinism, because I love and respect any Calvinist whose Lord is Jesus. I have enjoyed other writings by John Piper as well as other Calvinists, and I often serve in ministry along side of Calvinistic Christians who are devoted servants of Christ. I have, however, written rather passionately on some points, because I am passionate for God’s glory. If those passionate points seem harsh, please forgive me.

Near the end of his booklet, Piper quotes legendary Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon, who said that he began as an Arminian (Arminians disagree with all five points of Calvinism), like everyone else. This is a telling remark because it is so true. No one begins as a Calvinist. They only become Calvinists as they are taught Calvinism. Piper’s own

testimony is no different. He admits “many years of struggle” (p. 1, prgh. 4) before he was able to accept Calvinism. Perhaps even more difficult than the struggle to accept Calvinism is the struggle to reject it after one has struggled so hard to accept it. But it can, and has, been done.

John Piper writes, “We are open to changing any of our ideas which can be shown to contradict the truth of Scripture.” I’m glad to know that, because I am about to show how Piper’s ideas contradict the truth of Scripture. May I say that I am also open to scrutiny of my comments by anyone who presents a logical and scriptural argument, as I too, like so many Calvinists, am sincerely desirous of understanding God’s truth. Although I have given this paper to a number of Calvinists, I’m still waiting for any refutation. If you are a Calvinist who can’t refute what I’ve written, you are not a Calvinist at all. If you cannot defend what you say you believe, you don’t really believe it.

How difficult it is to truly be open to truth that challenges our long-held beliefs! May God help us all, by His grace, to comprehend His great plan of salvation.

1. Total Depravity and Irresistible Grace

Let us first consider points one and four of Calvinism’s TULIP: *Total Depravity* and *Irresistible Grace*. Without a doubt they are intrinsically linked, and thus it is almost impossible to consider one without mentioning the other. (Moreover, the other three points are built upon these pillars, and if these fall, the others must follow.)

All Christians rightly maintain that humanity is sinful by nature, born with a propensity to sin. This fact is easily proved from Scripture (not to mention human experience). In Romans 3:9-12, for example, Paul records a sampling of God’s assessment of sinful humanity as found in various Psalms: “There is none righteous, not even one...there is none who seeks for God...there is none who does good.” Paul writes in Ephesians 2:1, 3 that we were “dead in [our] trespasses and sins....by nature children of wrath.” Unregenerate people are “slaves to sin” (Rom. 6:6) and are “held captive” by Satan “to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:26).

Clearly, the Bible affirms that, in general, humanity is very corrupt and sinful. In fact, unless God did something to get our attention and draw us to Him, we would never turn from our sins. Moreover, no person can escape his slavery to sin apart from God's gracious help. We thus affirm man's depravity, God's prevenient grace (i.e., a grace shown by God that precedes regeneration) and His enabling grace that empowers us to live holy lives once we are born again.

Calvinists, however, go further than that when they speak of man's depravity and God's grace. They believe that unregenerate people are so corrupt that it is actually *impossible* for them to submit to God or believe in Jesus; thus they are *totally* depraved. Moreover, unless God sovereignly changes their wills by a grace that is *irresistible*, they will *never* submit to God or repent. Even though people might *think* they have the choice to repent, they are making a wrong assumption according to the Calvinist. If they *don't* repent, they are actually doing the only thing they can do, because God didn't grant to them His irresistible grace. If they do repent, they are actually doing what would be impossible for them *not* to do, because God is sovereignly influencing and changing them by a grace that is irresistible. *Thus, they are making no choice at all in the matter of salvation.* Rather, God is choosing them and making them into believers. He is changing their wills, because totally depraved people, according to the Calvinist, would never, and could never, humble themselves or choose to repent.

Interestingly, however, many Calvinists maintain that unregenerate people *do* possess free wills to some degree. John Piper states,

There is no doubt that man *could* perform more evil acts toward his fellow man than he does. But if he is restrained from performing more evil acts by motives that are not owing to his glad submission to God, then even his "virtue" is evil in the sight of God (p. 5, prgh 2, emphasis added).

If unregenerate man *could* perform more evil acts toward his fellow man but *doesn't* because he is *restrained* by some wrong inward motive (thus the man is restrained by *himself*, and not some outside force), then unregenerate man is making a moral decision by his own free will. Piper also states, "Except for the continual exertion of saving grace, we will always *use our freedom* to resist God" (p. 9, prgh. 6, emphasis added).

Note again the affirmation of the free will of regenerate and unregenerate man ("use our freedom"), but Piper believes that unregenerate man will always use his freedom to resist God, because he is totally depraved.

If this is so, then it is not too strong of a statement to say that Calvinists believe that God causes people to believe in Christ and be born again *against their wills*, because they would never and could never have chosen to believe and be born again otherwise. Given the choice, they would have preferred to stay in sin, not repent or believe, and never be born again. Just before God bestowed His "irresistible grace" upon them, had you asked them if they wanted to repent and follow Jesus, they would not have answered in the affirmative. But, moments later, God forces them into doing what they would have resisted moments earlier, would never have wanted, and could not have done. Thus, every person whom God causes to be born again, He causes them to be born again against their wills, and that is what Calvinists believe even if they say they don't.

Piper explains that some influence by the Holy Spirit *can* be resisted, but that "the Holy Spirit can overcome all resistance and make His influence irresistible" (p. 9, prgh. 1). Thus, God can send two kinds of influence: that which is resistible and that which is irresistible, whichever kind He wills. Piper further elaborates on this as he explains how God can sovereignly give someone the ability to repent, which, according to Piper, is another way of describing how God sends His irresistible grace upon a person:

When a person hears a preacher call for repentance he can resist that call. But if God gives him repentance he cannot resist because the gift is the removal of the resistance. Not being willing to repent is the same as resisting the Holy Spirit. So if God gives repentance it is the same as taking away the resistance. This is why we call this work of God "irresistible grace" (p. 10, prgh. 6).

Directly after this explanation, Piper declares: "Note: It should be obvious from this that irresistible grace *never implies that God forces us to believe against our will*. That would even be a contradiction in terms" (p. 10, prgh. 7, emphasis added).

I must ask, how could irresistible grace work on a totally depraved person so as not to be forcing him to believe against his will? If the unregenerate person is initially able to resist God's grace as he hears the gospel preached, then God must at that time be sending him a grace that is resistible. The totally depraved man, according to Piper, will always continue to resist God's grace as long as it is of the "resistible" type. But as soon as God bestows some "irresistible grace" the man *immediately* can no longer resist (because the grace is *irresistible*, which means it can't be resisted for even a second), and so he is *immediately* born again and believes. But just a moment ago, he was resisting! How can Piper then say that "it should be obvious from this that irresistible grace never implies that God forces us to believe against our will"? Not only is that *not* obvious, it stands in direct contradiction to what Piper has just said!

Piper's logic becomes even more convoluted as he continues: "On the contrary, irresistible grace is compatible with preaching and witnessing that tries to persuade people to do what is reasonable and what will accord with their best interests" (p. 10, prgh. 7). Piper apparently realizes that the concept of irresistible grace raises an immense problem regarding the necessity of persuasive preaching, a problem he hopes to avoid with a one-sentence disclaimer that only exposes his problem. Piper's concept of irresistible grace is clearly *not* compatible with persuasive preaching.

Here is my question to the Calvinist: Why *must* we preach the gospel in order for people to be saved? If man plays no part at all in his conversion, why *must* he hear the gospel to be saved, as Paul says he must in Romans 10:14? A consistently logical Calvinist could never say that persuasive preaching *influences* the unregenerate person to yield to God, because the unregenerate person will always use his freedom to resist God (Piper, p. 9, prgh. 6). Thus the *only* way an unregenerate person becomes regenerate is if God sovereignly bestows upon him His irresistible grace. So all the persuasive preaching in the world won't make a bit of difference in the saving of anyone. In fact, to even *attempt* to persuade someone is an attack on God's supposed sovereign grace in salvation, because to do so implies that salvation rests, in part, on the hearer and also rests, in part, on the preacher.

According to the Calvinist who is consistent, our preaching *cannot* have any persuasive power over one who is totally depraved, and if it does, then we must admit that unregenerate man can do something (be persuaded) that leads to his salvation.

If man has nothing to do with his repentance because the ability to repent is God's gift, then why did Paul so often *reason* with the Jews from the Scriptures to *prove* that Jesus was the Messiah (e.g., see Acts 17:2-4)? Why did he attempt to "persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11) and *beg* people to be "reconciled to God"? (2 Cor. 5:20). Why do we read in Acts 28:24 (as Paul reasoned with the Jews about Jesus), "And some were being *persuaded* by the things spoken, but others *would not believe*" (emphasis added)? Why did Paul write, "I have become all things to all men, *that I may* by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22, emphasis added)? Why did he write that the Jews hindered him from "speaking to the Gentiles *that they might be saved*" (1 Thes. 2:16, emphasis added)?

Clearly, Paul believed that what he said and did affected the results of his evangelism, because people's wills played a part in their salvation. Again, a preacher's *attempt* to persuade an unregenerate man would be an admission that man plays a part in his repentance, and it would be an affront to God's sovereignty—if no man can be saved apart from God's irresistible grace. In fact, to try to persuade an unregenerate person to yield to Christ is to mislead him into thinking that he is not so totally depraved after all, because he can choose to repent!

To a Calvinist who remains consistent with his theology, *persuasive preaching is ineffectual and useless*, and the Calvinist can draw no other conclusion, lest he be guilty of believing that salvation is not completely the sovereign work of God. There is no escape from this: If people must hear preaching in order to be saved, then people (and preachers) play a part in their salvation, because preaching persuades them to do something, and thus they must have free wills that can choose to repent. This is just one more proof that salvation is not solely the work of God. Man must play a part, otherwise there would be no need for preaching.

Calvinists attempt to answer this particular objection by saying that preaching the gospel is simply a *means* God uses in saving people. I must ask then, "Is it a meaningless means or a meaningful means?" If it

is a meaningless means, then why do you call it a *means*? If something is a means to something else, then it serves a purpose to a certain end. There is no such thing as a meaningless means.

If it is a meaningful means, then it serves some purpose that needs to be served to reach the desired ends. According to Scripture, preaching the gospel is an *essential* means (see Rom. 10:14), because by it God's message is communicated to people who, if they are to be saved, must believe God's message and repent. Thus, people's salvation is dependent on preachers preaching and hearers responding.

If salvation is supposedly a sovereign act of God who bestows on some people His irresistible grace, why don't Calvinists simply stand in front of unregenerate audiences and recite nursery rhymes? Then they could prove the truth of their doctrine of irresistible grace as people are sovereignly born again. Yet I notice that Calvinists try to appeal to the minds and hearts of their hearers in order to *persuade* them to repent and believe, something their audiences, by definition, *can't do* unless God sovereignly regenerates them. The preaching of Calvinists contradicts what they say they believe.

There are many biblical examples of the *effects* of persuasive preaching that could be cited. For example, Acts 17:11-12 tells us:

Now these [Berean Jews] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. Many of them *therefore believed* [note that *they* believed because *they* were noble-minded and thus searched the Scriptures daily] along with a number of prominent Greek women and men (emphasis added).

Their receptivity had something to do with their salvation, as Jesus plainly taught in the Parable of the Sower and the Soils (see Mark 4:1-20).

If Calvinists are consistent with their theology, what is the gospel that they should proclaim? Should they deceive their audiences, calling on them to repent and believe in Christ, misleading them into thinking that they *can do something* in regards to their salvation, thus strengthening

their listener's pride and increasing their spiritual darkness? Or do they tell them the "truth" that they are so depraved that they are incapable of submitting to God, and unless God shows them His irresistible grace, they can never be saved? How does "faith come from hearing" (Rom. 10:17) that?

Obviously, such a "gospel" leaves nothing for the hearer to cling to in faith. That is why Calvinists keep their unique doctrines secret from the unregenerate, only to reveal them at a later time to Christians when they are ready to receive the "truth." Truly, the five points of Calvinism are the "family secret." Even though they are supposedly the foundational truths of salvation, they dare not be revealed to the unsaved. This, by itself, shows the fallacy of Calvinism. Calvinists intuitively know that if they tell unregenerate people the "truth," they will have no converts. So they preach a deceptive Arminian gospel, hope for a response, and later let their converts know "what really happened."

Calvinistic Converts

I can't help but wonder how God takes pleasure in people who are, against their wills, supposedly regenerated by God's irresistible grace. They are really nothing more than robots. If they love Him, it is only because they had no choice but to love Him, because they would have preferred to continue hating Him. This means, of course, that they really *don't* love Him, because love is predicated upon choice. Their warm feelings toward Him are pre-programmed; thus true love is impossible. I encourage the reader to take a puppet made from a sock, put it on his hand, have it turn and look at him, and then have it say, "I love you!" Does that give the reader the same feeling as when his spouse or child says those words? And why not? Because free will has been eliminated. The puppet is only saying what you are making him say.

I also can't help but wonder about the validity of Piper's belief that unregenerate man will always use his freedom to resist God. Imagine a man who is an adulterer. His God-given conscience condemns him continually (see Rom. 2:15), but he continues in his adulterous relationship. Thus he is using his freedom to resist God, which Piper says

is all he can or will ever do since he is totally depraved. But imagine that he finally breaks off his adulterous relationship due to guilt. Now can it still be said that he has only used his freedom to resist God? No, it cannot. He used his freedom to repent of adultery, and yielded to his God-given conscience. If he can use his freedom to do that, why can't he, with the help of the Holy Spirit, repent of a lifestyle of rebellion and humble himself before God?

How could someone who has the free choice to remain *unrepentant* possibly *not* have the freedom to choose *to* repent? How could a person have the capacity to choose to become more evil but not have the capacity to choose to become less evil? Merely by choosing to not become more evil is by default, a choice for good. If we can use our freedom to resist God but can't use it to yield to God, we really have no freedom at all. We're robots, programmed to do evil, having no freedom. It is utterly impossible to have *freedom* to resist God if one doesn't have *freedom* to yield to God. Calvin himself certainly admitted this fact, writing in his *Institutes*,

"Nothing is more absurd than to think anything at all is done but by the ordination of God....Every action and motion of every creature is so governed by the hidden counsel of God, that nothing can come to pass, but what was ordained by Him....The wills of men are so governed by the will of God, that they are carried on straight to the mark which He has fore-ordained" (*Cal. Inst.*, book 1, chapter 16, sect. 3).

At least Calvin was consistent in this respect. He admitted (unlike some modern Calvinists) that there really was no room for free will in this theology. If depraved man can do nothing other than sin, then he has as much free will as a bullet shot from a gun.

Calvinists clearly add to what Scripture states regarding humanity's depravity and God's grace. Although unregenerate people are indeed, "dead in [their] trespasses and sins," *hundreds* (if not *thousands*) of scriptures clearly state or imply that spiritually dead people can choose to humble themselves and repent, especially while they are under the influence of the gracious drawing of God's Spirit. God's drawing, however, never forces anyone to repent, nor does it change anyone's will apart from the consent of his heart.

Although Scripture repeatedly decries the sinful state of humanity, at the same time it calls on *all* people to repent; thus it is obvious that *all* spiritually dead people still have the capacity to repent. For example, Paul publicly proclaimed, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that *all everywhere* should repent” (Acts 17:30, emphasis added). If Paul believed that people were so depraved that they had no capacity to repent, he would not have said that God was calling *all people everywhere* to repent, unless he was a deceiver. Moreover, if it were impossible for spiritually dead people to repent, God would be unrighteous to expect *all* of them to do what they are incapable of doing and then hold them guilty for not doing it.

Like Paul, John the Baptist, Jesus, and all the other apostles preached the gospel, calling on *all* people to repent (see Matt.3:2; 4:17; 11:20; Mark 6:12; Luke 5:32; 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 11:18; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Several times in the book of Revelation, John is amazed that unregenerate people don’t repent while suffering God’s judgments (see Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9, 11). Jesus pronounced woe upon all the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida because they didn’t repent, obviously indicating He believed they had the capacity to repent (see Matt. 11:21). He also declared that the wicked people of Tyre and Sidon, who didn’t repent, *would* have repented if they had seen miracles like the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida had seen! In both cases, Jesus believed that those who *didn’t* repent had the capacity *to* repent and *should* have repented, in contrast to Calvinists, who believe unregenerate people have no capacity to repent outside of God changing their wills and forcing them to repent (which He only does for some). Thus, Calvinism portrays Jesus as a liar and a deceiver, because Jesus gave all indication that people could do what He knew full well they couldn’t do. This also makes God the Father a liar, as Jesus only spoke His words (see John 12:49).

Jesus expected *everyone* of His generation to repent, because He stated that the men of Nineveh, who repented at Jonah’s preaching, would rightfully condemn His generation for not repenting. Again, if they had no capacity to repent, He would not have condemned them, as that would make God unrighteous. Moreover, what right would the repentant people of Nineveh have to condemn Jesus’ unrepentant generation? The people

of Jesus' generation could rightly say, "How can you, who by God's sovereign decree could do nothing other than repent, condemn us, who by God's sovereign decree could do nothing other than remain unrepentant?"

Thus, the Calvinist, who believes God condemns people for not doing what they are incapable of doing, makes God grossly unjust. God is thus somewhat equivalent to the parent who spansks his baby for not walking, but He is a million times worse. Why? Because to the Calvinist, God tortures people eternally in hell for not doing what they were absolutely *incapable* of doing.

The Calvinist also makes God ultimately responsible for all the evil in the world. Why? Because God could put an end to all evil by influencing everyone with His irresistible grace, but He sovereignly chooses not to, thus evil remains only because of God's sovereign choice. Depraved man can supposedly do nothing but sin unless God keeps him from it by choosing to show him His irresistible grace, so the ultimate reason for evil is because God doesn't keep evil people from sinning.

Calvinists often decry the position of non-Calvinists, accusing them of making *man* responsible for his own *salvation* (which is a false accusation). Yet Calvinists make *God* responsible for the *damnation* of billions! Clearly, the God of Calvinism hates people even before they are born, when He determines that their eternal fate will be incarceration and agony in hell. If God is *solely* responsible for the salvation of certain people, He is also *solely* responsible for the damnation of everyone else, because only He could have rescued them from their fate, but He decided not to do so. And that decision was not predicated on God's *inability* to stop sin, but His *unwillingness* to stop it. Thus God wills sin in select people's lives. To the Calvinist, man doesn't stop sinning because he has no choice, but because God, who can stop sin, chooses not to! God is thus even more "totally depraved" than we are!

Calvinists should not object to this point, because Calvin himself believed that Adam fell, not because Adam chose by his own free will to sin, but because God ordained his fall:

God not only foresaw that Adam would fall, but also ordained that he should....I confess it is a horrible decree; yet no one can deny but God foreknew Adam's fall, and therefore foreknew it, because he had ordained it so by his own decree (*Cal. Inst.*, b. 3, c. 23, sec. 7).

The Calvinist also portrays God as a very confused God who is actually working against Himself, hating sin and evil, yet promoting the very thing He hates by creating people who have no capacity but to do evil and who are predestined to never change. Moreover, the Calvinist's God is a hypocrite, as He practices sins that He condemns in others, such as deception and showing partiality.

In summary, the Calvinist makes God a lying, deceiving, bigoted, malicious, unjust, confused hypocrite who is responsible for the world's evil and who creates people for the expressed purpose of torturing them forever. If any man did the things Calvinists say God does, every person on the earth would rightly consider that man worthy of immediate execution, and certainly not worthy to be worshiped. Who is really robbing God of glory? Is it the non-Calvinist who says that man must yield to God's Spirit using his God-given free will in order to be saved, or is it the Calvinist, who turns God into a monster?

Unlike the Calvinist who (whether he admits it or not) places the responsibility on *God* for people's lack of repentance, Jesus placed the blame on the unrepentant people themselves. He said as He wept over Jerusalem,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and *you were unwilling* (Matt. 23:37, emphasis added).

Notice that Jesus loved them all and wanted them all to repent, but they refused to yield to His love. The Calvinist, however, makes Jesus say, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her, proving that you are totally depraved. I *never* wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, thus I chose not to grant you My irresistible grace, and I predestined you to eternal damnation. I'm weeping now, not for you,

because I've hated you from the beginning. Rather, I'm weeping for no good reason. Perhaps I'm weeping for Myself, an unrighteous hypocrite, because I expect people to do what they can't do and I command people to do what I don't practice Myself." The Calvinist, who claims he is zealous for God's glory, makes God into an immoral, repugnant monster.

Jesus also rebuked the religious Jews, saying, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and *you* are *unwilling* to come to Me, that you may have life" (John 5:39-40, emphasis added). Clearly, Jesus believed that people had the capacity to choose to repent or not. This cannot be denied by any honest reader of Scripture.

Does Being Dead in Sin Make Repentance Impossible?

But how can one who is "dead in his sins" possibly repent and believe? some Calvinists ask. Isn't it true that dead people can do nothing and are unable to respond to outside influences?

Such logic, however, is seriously flawed, because it forces more meaning into the _expression, "dead in your trespasses and sins" than was obviously meant by the apostle Paul. Using such logic, we could just as well conclude that those who are dead in their sins cannot think, breath, speak or hope, since dead people can't do those things either. Like all metaphors, there are similarities that can be drawn between physical and spiritual death, but, like all metaphors, there comes a point where similarities turn to dissimilarities.

Paul's phrase, "dead in your trespasses and sins" expresses the fact that unregenerate man has no relationship with God because of his sins and is void of spiritual life in Christ as well as eternal life. It does not express the idea of man being incapable of making a choice to repent, just as it obviously does not imply man's inability to make any other choice, including moral choices. Unregenerate people have the capacity to choose between doing what God commands or *not* doing what God commands (irrespective of their motives for doing either), and this is quite obvious, because unregenerate people make choices all the time to obey

or disobey their own God-given consciences (see Rom. 2:14-15). They are not so evil that they are incapable of choosing to obey, for example, one of God's commandments. Sometimes unregenerate people even stop practicing certain sins while they continue in others, such as when the adulterer ends his affair because of his overwhelming guilt, or when the thief stops stealing for fear of being caught. So what is the difference between any other moral choice that an unregenerate person makes and the moral choice to repent and follow Jesus?

It is obvious from scores of scriptures that Paul did not believe that people who are dead in their trespasses and sins are incapable of submitting to God. From the time of Paul's conversion, Jesus made it clear to him that unregenerate people have the capacity *and* responsibility to turn from their sins. We read in Acts 26:16-20 Paul's narration before King Agrippa of his own conversion and calling, when Jesus said to him:

But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that *they* may *turn* from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in *order that* they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me (Acts 26:16-18, emphasis added).

Paul continued:

Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that *they should repent and turn to God*, performing deeds appropriate to repentance (Acts 26:19-20, emphasis added).

But are non-Calvinists saying that a sinful person can repent and believe apart from God's gracious assistance? Any who do are in error. God graciously attempts to get the attention of the unregenerate man, speaking to Him through His creation (see Rom. 1:18-20), His providence (see Acts 14:17), and each person's conscience (see Rom. 2:14-16). By

His Spirit and by His grace, God calls and anoints messengers who take the message of His saving grace to the sinner. By His Spirit and grace, God warns and convicts every sinner of sin, righteousness and judgment (see John 16:8). All of this God does by His grace in order that the sinner might be saved, and He does it all before the sinner has taken a single step towards repentance! Without God's prevenient grace, certainly no person would ever repent. Jesus is, as He declared, "draw[ing] *all* men to [Himself]" (John 12:32, emphasis added) since He has been lifted up from the earth by crucifixion. And as Jesus also declared, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44a). The Calvinist, ignoring the testimony of so much of Scripture that declares God's universal love, His universal atonement, and His universal call to salvation, wrongly concludes that the Father is only drawing *some*, but not *all*, to Jesus. Yet Jesus plainly stated that He would draw *all* men to Himself. *This fact cannot be denied by any honest reader of Scripture.*

Note, however, that although Jesus is drawing all men to Himself, not all men are saved. This again proves that man has something to do with his salvation. He must yield to God's drawing.

John 6:64-65

Another similar Calvinistic misinterpretation revolves around Jesus' words in John 6:64-65. We read Jesus saying, "But there are some of you who do not believe."

John then interjects: "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him." John then continues his narrative: "And He [Jesus] was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.'"

Disregarding the greater context of John 6:41-71 as well of scores of other scriptures that reveal God's desire for all people to come to Jesus (e.g., Matt. 11:28; 16:25; 22:9; Mark 16:15; Luke 9:23; John 3:16-17; 5:34-40; 7:37; 12:47; Acts 17:30; 1 Tim 2:3-6; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 John 4:14),

Calvinists conclude that Jesus' statement, "No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father" proves that God sovereignly chooses only some to be saved.

This interpretation, however, stands in contradiction to so many other plain scriptures that declare God's love for all, Jesus' death for all, and God's desire that all be saved. Since inspired Scripture can't contradict itself, we must find an interpretation that harmonizes rather than contradicts the rest of Scripture.

When Jesus said, "There are some of you who do not believe," it wasn't the first time He mentioned believing in John's sixth chapter. Jesus spoke in 6:28-29, 35-36, 40, 47 of believing in Him, and He spoke of it in such a way that anyone who reads what He said without a preconceived bias would conclude that believing in Him was something anyone *could* do, and something that God desires every person *to* do.

Thus, in 6:64, Jesus indicts some of His audience for not believing, just as He did to the crowd in 6:36. Clearly, believing is something *they* were supposed to do, not something that God did for them. Jesus said, "Some of *you* do not *believe*." Those words strongly affirm the non-Calvinist view of human responsibility in salvation.

John then explains that Jesus possessed foreknowledge of those who would not believe, which of course is no surprise. Non-Calvinists maintain (and rightly so) that God knew before the foundation of the world who would and who would not believe in Jesus. John is only endorsing that truth, again affirming the non-Calvinist view. And John again supports the non-Calvinist view that each individual is held responsible to believe. Notice that John said, "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who *did not* [not *could not*] believe, and who it was that *would* [not *had no choice but to*] betray Him" (6:64).

Finally, John quotes Jesus as saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted from the Father" (6:65). Contextually, Jesus must mean that God grants that people can come to Jesus only by believing, and that is in perfect harmony with what Jesus said in the two preceding verses, the entire context of 6:26-71, and the whole of Scripture.

Calvinists also use this portion of Scripture to support the theory that the reason Judas betrayed Jesus is because salvation was not granted to Judas. This, of course, makes God the real betrayer of His Son Jesus, as it eliminates Judas' responsibility in the matter. To the Calvinist, Judas had no choice but to betray Jesus—He was acting out his predetermined destiny. But if this were true, why would Jesus pronounce woe upon Judas for what he did, clearly holding him responsible for his treacherous act? If Judas had no choice but to betray Jesus because God didn't grant him salvation, why would Jesus say, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matt. 26:24). How could Jesus rightly hold Judas responsible for his actions if he really had no free choice in the matter? To the Calvinist, it was actually God the Father who betrayed Jesus, and Judas was just a tool in God's hand. Thus Jesus should have said, "Woe to My Father for betraying Me!"

God Granting Repentance

But what about the biblical statements that indicate that God *grants* repentance? For example, Peter proclaimed of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, *to grant repentance* to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31).

There are only two possible interpretations that can be made from Peter's statement. Either God was sovereignly giving *each and every* totally-depraved, unable-to-repent Israelite the ability and the will to repent by His irresistible grace (note that Peter said that Jesus granted repentance to *Israel*, not *some Israelites*), or God was granting all Israel, individually and corporately, the opportunity to repent, as well as His gracious help in their repentance.

If the first interpretation is correct, then every Israelite would have been saved, because, as already noted, God granted repentance to *Israel*, that is, the whole nation, and not certain individual Israelites. If Calvinists apply their doctrine to this scripture, they would have to conclude that God was bestowing His irresistible grace upon *every* Israelite. Of course,

all Israel was not saved, thus proving that the first interpretation is incorrect.

This leaves us with only the second interpretation remaining, and it is the only one that makes sense and harmonizes with the rest of Scripture. Because God has given man free will, man has a part (albeit a very small part compared with God's part) in his own salvation. He must cooperate with God if he is to be saved. God takes the initiative, loves the sinner, dies for him, draws and convicts him by His creation, His providence and Spirit, sends messengers to him, sometimes performs miracles before him, offers him salvation, and gives him the opportunity to repent and believe. If the man yields to all this influence, believing the gospel and humbling his proud heart, God's grace continues to work, graciously helping him to repent by the Holy Spirit's power, just as He helps the man all the rest of his Christian life to obey God. Both God and man play a part in man's repentance and ongoing sanctification.

Peter, of course, did not believe when he said that Jesus has "granted repentance to Israel," that man's free will played no part in his salvation. He would later write, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, *not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*" (2 Pet. 3:9, emphasis added). Clearly, Peter believed that God wants everyone to repent, but just as clearly, not all do, because *they play a part in their repentance*. On the other hand, we must never neglect to say that there is no man who could repent apart from God's grace. We must have His help to come to the light, repent and believe. Piper cites John 3:20-21 as proof that those who come to the light are those in whom God does His work. I agree. No man will come to the light unless God works in him. Piper, however, elevates scriptures such as John 3:20-21 that highlight God's part in man's salvation, and does not acknowledge the many scriptures that would serve to balance his position, those that emphasize man's part in his salvation. Salvation occurs when man does not abort God's plan for him, but cooperates with God, who sent his son to be the "true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man" (John 1:9, emphasis added). Why doesn't Piper mention that verse?

When Peter reported to the Jerusalem elders that Gentiles had been saved and God had poured His Holy Spirit upon them, they

acknowledged, “Well then, God has *granted* to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18, emphasis added). They were amazed that God was granting salvation to sinful Gentiles.

Again, according to the Jerusalem elders, God granted repentance to “the Gentiles,” that is, all the Gentiles, not just some pre-selected individuals. Thus, we’ve now learned from Scripture that God has granted repentance to *Israel* (see Acts 5:31) and the *Gentiles* (see Acts 11:18). That includes everyone. Since not all Israelites and Gentiles have repented, we can safely conclude that God’s granting them repentance does not mean that man plays no part in his repentance, which is also obvious from scores of other scriptures. Piper neglects to mention the scores of other scriptures that help us understand man’s obvious part in repentance, and quotes only one scripture (2 Tim 2:24-26) that he misuses to buttress Calvinism’s lop-sided view.

Let us consider that one scripture about repentance that Piper mentions. Paul wrote,

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if *perhaps God may grant them repentance* leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24-26, emphasis added).

Again, Paul couldn’t have been saying that man plays no part in his repentance and that repentance is a sovereign gift of God, otherwise he would have been contradicting so much of what he himself wrote. For example, Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:3-4: “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires *all* men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (emphasis added).

So if we are to harmonize Paul with Paul, we must conclude that he was emphasizing God’s part in man’s repentance. No one can repent without God’s help, because unregenerate man is a slave to sin (see Rom. 6:6). God wants *all* to repent. He is granting every person the opportunity to repent. And He is offering the ability to repent to all who humble themselves. “God...gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6). He, not they, is

the one who frees them from their slavery to sin. And that is more likely to happen if the Lord's bond-servants are kind and gentle to their opponents, as their kindness has a softening affect on their opponents' hearts.

Again, if God was sovereignly granting repentance apart from man's willingness, what is the point of Paul's admonition to the believers to be kind and gentle to their opponents? If God is sovereignly granting repentance, it makes no difference if the believers are kind and gentle to their opponents! But because God is not sovereignly granting repentance, believers' actions can make the difference in an unbeliever's receptivity to the freedom from sin that God is offering them. (Incidentally, why didn't John Calvin follow Paul's instruction to be kind and gentle to one's opponents when he had Michael Servetus slowly burnt at the stake for doctrinal differences?)

In the Calvinistic interpretation of scriptures like those just mentioned, we can see the primary flaw in their methods of interpretation, that of ignoring context. Calvinists focus on certain "supportive" scriptures and ignore those that clearly contradict their interpretation of the "supportive" ones. Thus, their interpretation does not harmonize with the whole of Scripture. They have emphasized God's sovereignty to the extreme, to the point of excluding what Scripture says about man's responsibility and God-given free will. Calvinists dive into a haystack to find a needle, and when they are pricked by something sharp, they exclaim, "This isn't a stack of hay, it's a stack of needles, just as I suspected!"

The Mind Set on the Flesh Cannot Submit to God

By ignoring context, Calvinists misinterpret many scriptures. For example, Piper cites Romans 8:7 to support the Calvinistic ideas of unregenerate man's complete inability to repent and his need of God's *irresistible* grace. In Romans 8:7 Paul writes, "Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, *for it is not even able to do so*" (emphasis added). Piper points to this scripture as proof that unregenerate people are not able to

submit to God's law. Thus they are totally depraved and in need of God's irresistible grace if they are to be saved.

But is this one verse the only verse in Scripture that explains anything about the state of unregenerate man? Does this one sentence in Romans 8 nullify or supercede everything else the Bible says about salvation? Was Paul a fool who contradicted his own teaching earlier in the book of Romans (e.g. Rom. 2:14-15)? No! Thus, we must interpret this one verse so that it harmonizes with everything else the Bible says. And that is quite easy to do. Paul is simply saying in Romans 8:7 that a mind that is "set on the flesh," which is a "hostile" mind, does not submit to God and cannot submit to God. But does this prove that one can't, with God's gracious help, soften his hostile mind, yield to God's call, and repent of setting his mind on the flesh? No, it does not. All of Scripture leads us to believe that such a thing is quite possible.

In the very next verse we read, "And those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God (Rom. 8:8, emphasis added). Does this verse prove that it is impossible for one to repent, no longer be "in the flesh" but be "in the Spirit"? Obviously not.

Moreover, did Paul write what he wrote in Romans 8:7 to prove the truth of man's total depravity and his need for God's irresistible grace? No, he was writing to Christians to describe the difference between them and nonbelievers (see 8:4-11), to help them understand their obligation to put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit, and to warn them against "living according to the flesh" lest they die (see 8:12-14). Again we see the classic error of the Calvinist who ignores context.

Calvinism's Inconsistency

Piper contradicts his own theology at one point, when, after elaborating on man's total depravity and complete inability to submit to God, he states. "If we think of ourselves as basically good or even less than totally at odds with God, our grasp of the work of God in redemption will be defective. But *if we will humble ourselves* under this terrible truth of our total depravity..." (p. 8, prgh. 1, emphasis added). Surely, Piper is not

speaking here to people who have been regenerated and indwelt by God's Spirit, who are forgiven, clothed in Christ's righteousness and set free from sin's dominion! Those kinds of people are not *totally* depraved! Every Calvinist admits that regenerate people *can* make the choice to obey God, thus no regenerate person can be considered to be *totally* depraved by Calvinistic terms and definitions. Thus, Piper is speaking to the unregenerate at this point, those whom he says are totally depraved and will always use their freedom to resist God (see p. 9, prgh. 6) since, of course, they have no capacity to do otherwise. Yet he counsels these depraved people to humble themselves, something that is *impossible* for them to do apart from God's sovereign choice to show them His irresistible grace! Like all other Calvinists, Piper finds it very difficult to remain consistent with his own conclusions.

There is no better illustration of Calvinistic contradiction than at the end of his booklet, where Piper complementarily quotes renowned Reformed theologian J.I. Packer, who attempts to explain what a person must do who desires to be saved. We would expect Packer to say that one can do absolutely *nothing* to be saved, since salvation is supposedly all the work of God and none of man. The very question, "What must I do to be saved?" reveals that the inquirer, according to the Calvinist, doesn't understand that salvation is the sovereign work of God. The consistent Calvinist must tell such an inquirer, "You can't do anything! If God has pre-selected you, He will change your will by His irresistible grace, regenerate you, and give you the gift of repentance and faith. Your very question is presumptuous and reveals your pride. But you can do nothing about your sin of pride, because you are totally depraved, and will only use your freedom to resist God! In fact (according to page 6 in Piper's booklet) you are so totally depraved that any attempts you make at repentance are actually evil in God's eyes, because everything you do is a sin."

Keep in mind that Piper has already declared that God first sovereignly regenerates the sinner, who then immediately receives Christ. According to the Calvinist, one doesn't believe in Christ and then God regenerates him; God regenerates him and then he believes, because he had no capacity to believe as one dead in his sins. Says Piper,

We believe that new birth is a miraculous creation of God that enables a formerly “dead” person to receive Christ and so be saved. We do not think that faith precedes and causes new birth. Faith is the evidence that God has begotten us anew....The two acts (regeneration and faith) are so closely connected that in experience we cannot distinguish them. God begets us anew and the first glimmer of life in the newborn child is faith. This new birth is the effect of irresistible grace, because it is an act of sovereign creation” (p. 11, prgh. 7, p. 12, prgh. 1, emphasis added).

And so I must then ask, who is this person who is asking, “What must I do to be saved?” He must be unregenerate, as he is confessing that he does not believe he is saved, indicating that God has not regenerated him nor given him the gift of faith. As an unregenerate person, he is either predestined to be sovereignly changed by God’s irresistible grace or he is not predestined to be changed. (We will later consider the Calvinistic doctrine of Unconditional Election.) If he is not predestined to be sovereignly changed, then there is nothing he can do to be saved because he will never be saved. He has no chance of ever being saved.

If he is predestined to be sovereignly changed, either God is currently showing him his irresistible grace, or God is not. If God is currently showing him His *irresistible* grace, then he *can’t* resist for a moment and so he must now be regenerate; but he can’t be regenerate because he is confessing that he does not believe that he is saved, indicating that God has not regenerated him and given him the gift of faith. Thus we can be certain that God is not currently, at that moment, changing him by His irresistible grace, and if he is to ever be regenerated, he must wait until God does show him His irresistible grace.

So we have left only two possibilities: Either the man is predestined to be changed by God’s grace at some point in the future or he is not. Currently, though, there is nothing he can do but continue to sin (he’s totally depraved), wait, and hope (which, of course, he does not, will not, and cannot do, since he is totally depraved). To tell the man to believe in Jesus is absurd, because he can’t do that until after he is regenerate, according to Calvinists. (Yet that is what Paul told the Philippian jailer to do in order to be saved, because Paul believed in Jesus’ plan and method of salvation rather than Calvin’s.)

Now, read how Calvinistic theologian, J.I. Packer, answers the person who asks, "What must I do to be saved?" My comments are contained within brackets.

To the question: what must I do to be saved? The old gospel (Calvinism) replies: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. [Yet why would Packer tell a person who is obviously unregenerate to do something *he* can't possibly do?] To the further question: what does it mean to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? its reply is: it means knowing oneself to be a sinner, and Christ to have died for sinners; abandoning all self-righteousness and self-confidence, and casting oneself wholly upon Him for pardon and peace; and exchanging one's natural enmity and rebellion against God for a spirit of grateful submission to the will of Christ through the renewing of one's heart by the Holy Ghost. [Note: Did the Philippian jailer know and do all this in order to be saved?]

So, to believe in Christ to be saved, I must, among other things, abandon all self-righteousness and self-confidence and exchange my natural enmity and rebellion against God for a spirit of grateful submission. Yet, according to the Calvinist, I can do none of these things unless God first regenerates me! And if He regenerates me, he also gives me faith in Christ! If I have faith in Christ, I don't need to be saved! So why is Packer telling me that I must do these things "through the renewing of [my] heart by the Holy Ghost"? If my heart is renewed through the Holy Ghost, I'll automatically do those things, because God has sovereignly changed me. I'm saved! I don't need *to be* saved!

Packer, no doubt, is aware of his inconsistency and the problem he is creating. But in an attempt to dig himself out of his inconsistency, he only digs himself deeper. He continues:

And to the further question still: how am I to go about believing and repenting, if I have no natural ability to do these things? [*Great question!*] It [Calvinism] answers: look to Christ, speak to Christ, cry to Christ, just as you are [a depraved person who would never and could never look, speak or cry out to Christ, who can't submit to God, and whom God is obviously not currently giving His irresistible grace, otherwise you would already be regenerate]; confess your sin, your impenitence, your unbelief, and cast yourself on His mercy; ask Him to give you a new

heart, working in you [what you obviously don't have yet:] true repentance and firm faith; [Yet all of these things the Calvinist says it is impossible for you to do as a totally depraved person until you are regenerated by God's irresistible grace! And Packer doesn't stop contradicting his own theology! He continues:] ask Him to take away your evil heart of unbelief and to write His law within you, that you may never henceforth stray from Him [How could one who is predestined before time and regenerated by God's sovereign choice ever turn away from God?]. Turn [!!!!] to Him and trust Him [!!!!] as best you [!!!!] can [but *you* can't!], and pray for grace to turn and trust more thoroughly; use the means of grace expectantly, looking to Christ to draw near to you as you seek to draw near to Him [Now *there's* a scripture that emphasizes man's part in salvation—Jas. 4:8—yet Packer interestingly reverses the order of it and adds the word “seek,” a pathetic attempt to make Scripture a little more acceptable to his theology, because he knows that totally depraved people *can't* “draw near to God”]; watch, pray, read and hear God's Word, worship and commune with God's people, and so continue till you know in yourself beyond doubt that you are indeed a changed being [When did *that* happen?], a penitent believer, and the new heart which you desired [Amazing! A totally depraved person wanted all those things and a new heart before God sovereignly gave it to him against his will!] has been put within you.

Packer's advice to the one who is sincerely seeking salvation repeatedly contradicts his own theology. In fact, according to his own theology, there are no unregenerate people sincerely seeking to know how to be saved, because people are totally depraved and use their freedom only to resist God and do evil. Packer would have been more consistent with his theology if he had answered the question, “What must I do to be saved?” by saying, “You can't be sincere in asking that!”

Not only is Packer's advice to salvation seekers inconsistent with his own theology, it is also potentially very dangerous to one's spiritual health. Let us say that a sincere seeker takes Packer's advice and follows his list of things he must do to find salvation. Let us also say that after he does all those things that he feels he is saved. *On what does his faith rest?* His faith cannot rest on any of God's promises, because, to the Calvinist, there is no promise of salvation that any individual may claim, because it is only God's will for some to be saved, and the names of those people

are not listed in the Bible. Thus the only real basis for his faith can be what he has done and is doing. His faith thus rests in his works, not in Christ, something Scripture repeatedly warns against.

The non-Calvinist, in contrast, can take Jesus at His word, who said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). He can cry out in faith, "Lord Jesus, I believe in You, and so according to your promise to everyone (that includes me), I have eternal life by faith!" His works will immediately validate his faith in Christ. While the non-Calvinist believer is rejoicing in the gift of His salvation and manifesting the Spirit's fruit, the Calvinist is still wondering if he is one of the chosen ones, and is looking at his works to try to convince himself that he is.

God Opens Hearts

Rather than allowing scripture to balance scripture, Calvinists consistently focus on scriptures that emphasize God's part in salvation and consistently ignore those that focus on man's part. They thus conclude that salvation is all the work of God and that man has no responsibility in the matter. For example, Piper points to Acts 16:14, where we read about Lydia listening to the preaching of Paul: "And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."

"See!" the Calvinist exclaims. "God opened Lydia's heart! That is just another way of saying that God showed Lydia His irresistible grace!"

Because such an interpretation stands in absolute contradiction to what thousands of scriptures say about God and salvation, the one who wants to harmonize Acts 16:14 with the rest of the Bible comes up with a better interpretation: Luke is simply emphasizing God's part in salvation. God succeeded in doing to Lydia's heart what He desires to do in everyone's heart. The reason He succeeded in Lydia's heart is because *she*, unlike some others, first submitted to listen to Paul's preaching, and then

yielded to the Holy Spirit's conviction and drawing. Lydia (the supposedly totally-depraved "worshiper of God") believed. Over the years, I've watched numerous people "open the hearts" of even their adversaries by various means, but I never thought that they did it without their adversaries' consent!

In the *very same chapter* in Acts, Luke clearly reveals that man has a part to play in his salvation. When the Philippian jailer asked what he must do to be saved (see Acts 16:30), Paul didn't respond, "*You* can't do anything! You may only be saved if it is God's preordained will, and if it is, He will show you His irresistible grace and you will be regenerated and given faith!" Rather, Paul told the jailer, "*Believe* [something *you* must do] in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

Paul could make this promise to the jailer and his entire household, because Paul knew that salvation was open to anyone who would believe in the Lord Jesus. Paul then "spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house" (Acts 16:32), because "faith comes by hearing" (Rom 10:17). They all believed, were saved and received baptism.

Here is how a Calvinist must understand the salvation of the Philippian jailer: When the jailer asked what he must do to be saved, he was obviously not yet under the influence of God's irresistible grace, or else he would already have been regenerate and would have already received the sovereign gifts of faith and repentance. Thus he was still totally depraved, always using his freedom to resist God. (That being so, we must wonder why a totally depraved person is sincerely asking what he must do to be saved. If the Calvinist says it is because this totally depraved person is under conviction from God, it must be that God is bestowing "resistible grace" rather than "irresistible grace." Yet the totally depraved sinner, according to Piper, will always use his freedom to resist God, so he would never sincerely seek to be saved. This jailer, however, was obviously sincerely seeking.)

When Paul told the jailer to believe in the Lord Jesus and he would be saved along with his household, Paul didn't know if the jailer was predestined to be saved or not, and so he must have been thinking to

himself, “I hope this guy is one of the predestined ones and that God is just about to bestow His irresistible grace upon him, because what I’ve just told him to do is absolutely impossible for him to do. I’ve actually deceived him, giving him a false hope if he’s not predestined to be saved. I also hope that all the members of his household are predestined to be saved and that God is about to bestow His irresistible grace on them as well, otherwise I’ve deceived the jailer about them also. Perhaps I should have just told him the truth about his total depravity and God’s irresistible grace.” How could any consistent and thoughtful Calvinist tell people that they will be saved if they believe in the Lord Jesus without having such thoughts go through his mind?

The book of Acts is full of indications that man plays a part in his salvation (e.g., Acts 2:37-41; 3:19-26; 7:51; 8:6-14, 22-23, 36-37; 9:35, 42; 10:34-35, 43; 11:21; 13:8-13, 38-41, 46-47; 14:1, 15:19; 16:30-34; 17:2-4, 11-12, 17, 30-31; 18:4-8, 19, 27-28; 19:8-9, 18; 20:21, 22:18, 26:17-20, 28:23-24). It is also full of indications that God is *very* active in trying to get people to respond to His love. Thus, once again, we see the primary error of the Calvinists. They focus on those scriptures that seem to support their doctrines, and ignore those that stand in direct contradiction, thus failing to harmonize scripture with scripture.

An example: Because Acts 2:47 says, “The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved,” should we rightly conclude, from that *single* verse, that God is the only one who plays a part in the salvation of people and that man plays no part because that verse only speaks of God doing something? Or could we rightly conclude that no one *repented* or *believed* the gospel, because that single verse *doesn’t* say anyone did those things? Could we rightly conclude that no one *preached* the gospel to those the Lord added to the church, because that one verse *says nothing* about anyone preaching? No intelligent Calvinist would make such conclusions! Yet that is precisely what Calvinists are doing with verses such as Acts 16:14, where we read that the Lord opened Lydia’s heart. Searching for the needle in the haystack, they are pricked by something sharp, and thus conclude the whole stack is not hay, but needles.

Satan Blinds the Minds of Unbelievers

Piper also cites 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 to support the Calvinistic idea of God's irresistible grace. There Paul writes,

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Does this passage prove that God only shines His light into the darkened hearts of certain ones whom He shows His irresistible grace? No, it does not, except to one who has a preconceived bias and is looking for verses to support his bias. This passage highlights Satan's part in keeping people in his clutches and God's part in releasing them from Satan's clutches. It does not emphasize man's part in that process of being freed from Satan. *This passage is not everything the Bible has to say on the subject of salvation!*

Certainly no Calvinist would conclude from this passage that the *only* reason unregenerate people perish is because Satan blinds them through no fault of their own! Rather, the Calvinist would be quick to say that there is more to it than that—the that-the unsaved man is totally depraved and always uses his freedom to resist God. Thus, this passage doesn't explain *everything* about why man is sinful, and neither does it explain *everything* about how man is freed from his sins. Rather, this passage focuses on Satan's influence and God's influence on unregenerate man. God's truth can break through Satan's lies that are believed in the hearts of unregenerate man.

I would also maintain that something of man's responsibility is implied in this passage, as Paul refers to the "perishing" as the "unbelieving." Unbelieving people are people who don't believe, and believing is something that Scripture repeatedly says is man's responsibility. In fact, everybody, regenerate and unregenerate, believes. The unregenerate

believe Satan's lies and can thus be said to be blinded by Satan, and the regenerate believe God's truth and are thus no longer blinded by Satan. Additionally, scores of scriptures, such as the most well known verse in the Bible—John 3:16, tell us that the reason people perish is because they don't believe.

Second, Paul refers to Satan as "the god of this world." Satan is "the god of this world" because he is the one whom the world has chosen to serve. But when *they* (to borrow Jesus' exact words) "turn...from the dominion of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18), Jesus then becomes their Lord and Satan is no longer their Master. God frees them from Satan's power.

2 Corinthians 4:6 does not prove that God sovereignly shines His light into the hearts of those He has pre-selected for salvation, and that He does not shine it into the hearts of those He has pre-selected for damnation. It simply says that God has shone His light into our hearts, contrasting that with Satan who had previously blinded our minds with his lies. To extract the Calvinistic concept of irresistible grace from this particular passage is to force more meaning into the passage than is actually there, and to pry out an interpretation that doesn't harmonize with the rest of Scripture. Moreover, if God sovereignly preordains who will and who will not be saved, this passage creates more problems for Calvinists than they want to handle. The reason is because they can only then conclude that God is the true force behind Satanic deception that blinds unbelievers, and that Satan is not the enemy of God but actually His obedient helper.

Does the New Birth Precede Faith?

Piper connects irresistible grace with the new birth on page 11 of his booklet, and states that God sovereignly regenerates us, which results in our having faith. The only scriptural support he offers for this view is 1 John 5:1, which he quotes from the *Revised Standard Version*: "Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." Piper's argument is that John's words, "has been," indicate that faith in Jesus is the evidence that one "has been," prior to his having faith, born again.

This is pathetic exegesis. John is not revealing that the new birth precedes faith, but is simply describing one result of faith in Jesus.

John's clear purpose in writing this verse was not to establish the order of the process of salvation, but to state one of the main points of the theme of his entire first epistle, which is "the evidence of the true Christian." John repeatedly lists three tests that one must pass in order to validate his authentic relationship with God: (1) he must love the brethren, (2) he must keep Christ's commandments, and (3) he must believe that Jesus is the Christ. In the verse under consideration (1 John 5:1), John touches on the third test, just as he does in other places in his epistle (see 1 John 2:18-27; 4:1-6, 14-15; 5:5, 10, 13).

Clearly, John did not believe that regeneration precedes faith. He wrote at the close of his Gospel: "But these have been written *that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and *that believing you may have life* in His name (John 20:31, emphasis added). Neither did Jesus believe that regeneration preceded faith: "While you have the light, *believe* in the light, *in order that you may become sons of light*" (John 12:36, emphasis added). Neither did Paul: "For you are all sons of God *through* faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26, emphasis added).

Incidentally, the NASB translation of 1 John 5:1 does not contain the past tense upon which Piper's interpretation rests: "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ *is* [not *has been*] born of God." Piper's interpretation of 1 John 5:1 is another imaginary needle in the haystack.

On this same subject, Piper attempts to explain away the obvious contradiction between his doctrine of the new birth preceding faith and John 1:12-13, which states, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Reading these words without a Calvinistic lens, any normal reader would think they meant that anyone could receive Christ by believing in His name, and as many as do, God gives them the right to become His children. (Thus, believing in Christ comes before regeneration.) This regeneration is not a physical birth, and it doesn't happen because man willed it, but because God wills it. Obviously, no person could cause himself to be spiritually reborn. But

God will regenerate anyone who believes in Jesus and make that person His child.

In his explanation of these two verses, Piper contradicts himself as well as John when he writes: "In other words, it is necessary to receive Christ [note his next words] *in order to become* a child of God [that means one receives Christ *before* he becomes a child of God, and receiving Christ is a condition that must first be met], but the birth that brings one into the family of God is not possible by the will of man. Man is dead in trespasses and sins. He cannot make himself new, or create new life in himself. He must be born of God. *Then, with the new nature of God, he immediately receives Christ*" (emphasis added). This directly contradicts what Piper has just said a few sentences ago, and what John actually wrote.

In conclusion, under the scrutiny of Scripture, the Calvinistic ideas of total depravity and irresistible grace are found to add to and contradict the revelation found in the Bible. These particular Calvinistic doctrines nullify Scripture's clear teaching regarding man's free will and his responsibility to respond to the gospel and cooperate with God. They make human beings into robots who are incapable of making moral choices and who have no capacity to love. They make Christians to be people whom God forced against their wills to become His children. They make the preaching of the gospel senseless, and make liars out of all gospel preachers who lead people to believe that they have a choice to make. They make meaningless Christ's and His apostles' appeals to repent and the hundreds of scriptures that state that people have the ability to do so. They make God an unjust judge who condemns people for doing what they are incapable of not doing. They also make Him into a confused mad man who works against Himself yet cooperates with Satan, and a hate-filled hypocrite who condemns others for what He is guilty of Himself. Moreover, they make Him responsible for the damnation of billions and ultimately responsible for all the suffering in the world, since only He can stop sin but He chooses not to regenerate billions of sinners.

Finally, Calvinists are not able to live consistently with their own doctrine, as they preach a deceptive Arminian gospel if they preach any gospel at all. They must lie (according to their beliefs of what the truth is) to anyone

who asks them, What must I do to be saved?” as J. I. Packer’s advice to sincere seekers revealed. All of this is done at the expense of Scripture, upon which they force their interpretations and twist, to the end that millions of people are currently deceived by their doctrine. How many people have given up hope of salvation because of Calvinistic teaching, thinking that they are not among the elect since they have felt no irresistible grace? Dear Calvinist, the blood of such people is on your hands.

2. Unconditional Election

So far we’ve covered the T and the I of the TULIP acronym. Now we will proceed with the U, which stands for Unconditional Election. This Calvinistic doctrine states that God, in eternity past, chose certain individuals for salvation. This election was not based on any merit of those chosen, and not due to anything God foreknew about them. The Calvinist points to the many scriptures that use words such as *chosen*, *elected*, and *predestined* to make his point.

No reasonable person would argue that the Bible doesn’t say that Christians have been chosen, elected or predestined by God. The debate between Calvinists and non-Calvinists is what those terms specifically mean. Calvinists argue that God’s election is *unconditional*, while non-Calvinists argue that election is *conditional*. Calvinists sometimes respond by saying that the term, “conditional election,” is an oxymoron and that non-Calvinists force a meaning upon the term “election.” Yet every election ever known to man has been conditional. We elect, or choose, a spouse based on criteria we have established. We elect politicians based on their voting records and promises. We elect, or choose, jobs based on benefits we will receive. Why then must the term “conditional election” be an oxymoron? When people use the word “election” in speaking of any subject other than theology, they are always speaking of a conditional election. Who has ever heard of any “unconditional election” outside of Calvinistic theology? Thus the phrase “unconditional election” is much more of an oxymoron.

Non-Calvinists maintain that before the foundation of the world, God

elected to save those, and only those, who believe. Thus our election is conditioned upon our faith. Those who believe make up the group of people whom the Bible refers to as the *elect* or *chosen* of God. And because God is all knowing, He foreknew those who would believe. We have been, as Peter writes, “chosen *according to the foreknowledge* of God” (1 Pet. 1:1-2, emphasis added). This view is the only one that is consistent with all of Scripture, as we will soon see.

The Calvinist, who believes in man’s total depravity and God’s irresistible grace, has no choice but to believe in God’s supposed unconditional election. His foundational theology leaves him no other alternative, and that is why Calvinists often begin, like John Piper, citing those two foundations as they begin to defend their concept of unconditional election (see Piper, p. 19, par. 1). If man is totally depraved and unable to repent, and salvation is all the work of God and none of man, then those who are saved must be so only because of God’s choosing them. There is, however, no need for me to respond to this typical initial argument, since we’ve found that the two foundational assumptions are fatally flawed. God doesn’t save people by bestowing on them irresistible grace, and no saved person was ever totally depraved by the Calvinistic definition.

Obviously, the idea of God predestining some to salvation means that He also predestined some to eternal damnation, what is called *reprobation*. Calvin wrote in his *Institutes*,

All men are not created for the same end; but some are fore-ordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation. So according as every man was created for the one end or the other, we say, he was elected, that is, predestined to life, or reprobated, that is, predestined to damnation (*Calv. Inst.*, book 3, chapter 21, section 1).

Some Calvinists who assert election foolishly deny reprobation, but there is no escape from the fact that it is impossible to hold one without holding the other. People who are not chosen to be saved are chosen to be damned. Calvin himself asserts this undeniable fact:

Many indeed (thinking to excuse God) own election, and yet deny reprobation; but this is quite silly and childish. For without reprobation,

election itself cannot stand; whom God passes by, those he reprobates. It is one and the same thing (*Calv. Inst.*, book 3, chapter 23, section 1).

Calvin was absolutely right on this point. “Without reprobation, election itself cannot stand.” Make no mistake about this: God wants certain people to go to hell, otherwise He would have predestined them to go to heaven and bestowed upon them His “irresistible grace.” And this is what makes the doctrine of unconditional election so repugnant to lovers of God, for it makes their God into a monster who creates people for the express purpose of tormenting them eternally in hell. From before the time they were born, they were doomed, with no hope of escaping eternal fires. It would have been better if such people had never been born. And some Calvinists say that this actually glorifies God.

Dear Calvinist, what would you say if you discovered that people were saying of you and your newly-wedded spouse, “I hear they are planning on having six children, five of whom they plan to cruelly torture all their lives, and one of whom they plan to treat kindly”? Would you not be greatly offended that anyone would even entertain such an awful rumor? Yet that is what you are saying about God! You nullify His great attributes of love and justice with your doctrine!

How is it possible to reconcile unconditional election/damnation with the scores of scriptures that clearly state that God desires for *all* to be saved? Here is just a small sampling:

“Go therefore to the main highways, and *as many as you find there, invite* to the wedding feast” (Matt. 22:9, emphasis added).

And [Jesus] said to them, “Go into *all* the world and preach the gospel to *all* creation” (Mark 16:15, emphasis added).

“I say these things that *you* [those who persecuted Him and wanted to kill Him; see John 5:16-18] *may be saved* (John 5:34, emphasis added). [And why were they not saved? Jesus explains in 5:40:] “And *you are unwilling* to come to Me, *that you may have life*” (emphasis added).

“And [God] made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face

of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-27).

“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that *all everywhere* should repent (Acts 17:30, emphasis added).

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires *all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, *who gave Himself as a ransom for all*, the testimony borne at the proper time (1 Tim. 2:3-6, emphasis added).

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, *not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance* (2 Pet. 3:9, emphasis added).

And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the *world* (1 John 4:14, emphasis added).

Anyone who believes these scriptures at face value must abandon the idea of unconditional election/damnation.

How is it possible to reconcile the idea of unconditional election with God's many universal invitations to salvation? How could He be considered anything less than a cruel deceiver if He invites people to receive His gift when He Himself has sovereignly decreed that they shall never receive it? What would we think of someone who holds a rope thirty feet above a man at the bottom of well and pleads with him to take hold of it so he can pull him out? We would think the rope-holder was deranged at best and a cruel demon at worst. Consider the following utterances from the lips of God's Son; if God has unconditionally elected some to salvation and the rest to damnation, could Christ have been sincere in saying the following?

Come to Me, *all* who are weary and heavy-laden, and I *will* give you rest (Matt. 11:28, emphasis added).

And He was saying to them *all*, “If *anyone* wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23, emphasis added).

For *whoever* wishes to save his life shall lose it; but *whoever* loses his life for My sake shall find it (Matt. 16:25, emphasis added).

For God so loved the *world*, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, *but that the world should be saved* through Him (John 3:16-17, emphasis added).

And if anyone hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, *but to save the world* (John 12:47, emphasis added).

If God has unalterably decreed some to salvation and the rest to damnation, then all the above scriptures are very misleading and Christ is a deceiver. Moreover, why does God plead with people to repent if they are incapable of doing so by His sovereign decree? Read the following small sampling of scriptures below and ask how they can possibly be reconciled with unconditional election/damnation without making God insincere at best and a cruel deceiver at worst:

Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever! (Deut. 5:29).

But My people did not listen to My voice; and Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices. Oh that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I would quickly subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries (Ps. 18:11-14).

Say to them, “As I live!” declares the Lord God, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek. 33:11)

Hundreds of scriptures like these could be cited. Why would God lament that His people would not change their hearts and plead with them to do so if they were unable to do so by His own sovereign decree? If that were actually the case, God is a fool. (Neither must He understand, as Calvinists do, that people are totally depraved and are incapable of turning from sin.)

How is it possible to reconcile the ideas of unconditional election and damnation with the many scriptures that declare that Jesus came to save all by dying for all, atoning for everyone's sins, even those who ultimately perish in hell? Scripture says,

All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity *of us all* to fall on Him (Is. 53:6, emphasis added).

For the Son of Man has come to save *that which was lost* (Matt. 18:11, emphasis added)

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the *world!*" (John 1:29, emphasis added).

For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that *the world* should be saved through Him (John 3:17, emphasis added).

I did not come to judge the world, but to save *the world* (John 12:47, emphasis added).

For God has shut up *all* in disobedience that He might show mercy to *all* (Rom. 11:32, emphasis added).

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for *all*, therefore *all* died; and He died for *all*, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf (2 Cor. 5:14-15, emphasis added).

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the

man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for *all*, the testimony borne at the proper time (1 Tim. 2:5-6, emphasis added).

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to *all* men (Tit. 2:11, emphasis added)

But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for *everyone* (Heb. 2:9, emphasis added).

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even *denying the Master who bought them*, bringing swift destruction upon themselves (2 Pet. 2:1, emphasis added).

He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and *not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world* (1 John 2:2, emphasis added).

In the last two scriptures quoted, we plainly see that Jesus paid for the sins of those who are not saved, including even false prophets.

How can the idea of unconditional election/damnation be reconciled with God's perfect justice? Even a child knows that such an idea holds intrinsic unfairness. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Gen. 18:25).

How will God judge the world in justice if unconditional election/damnation is true? When He says to the goats on His left, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink" and so on, might they not rightly say, "But we could not help but sin, because You created us totally depraved, and because we were not among the elect, You never did bestow upon us Your irresistible grace! We never had a chance to be saved, because our damnation You predestined before we were born! How can you righteously condemn us?"

Will God condemn them for what it was impossible for them not to do?

Will He punish them everlastingly for not escaping what they could not escape? He might as justly punish people because their hearts beat within them! So do Calvinists nullify God's justice by elevating His sovereignty to unbiblical proportions.

How can the idea of unconditional election/damnation be reconciled with the many scriptures that speak of God's love? We are told in Scripture that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and that He "is kind to ungrateful and evil men" (Luke 6:35). "The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9). How could it be said that God is good to those whom He creates and predestines to damnation?

Calvinists often speak of a "common grace" that is enjoyed by all, contrasting it with "saving grace" that is extended only to those who are predestined to salvation. In His common grace, they say, everyone experiences God's goodness and love, even those not predestined to salvation, in that they enjoy His goodness to them while on earth. He supplies them with food, covering, pleasures, and so on, all temporal manifestations of His kindness.

I would beg to differ however, that such "common grace" can rightfully be considered an expression of God's love towards one who is predestined to be damned. In light of what he must suffer for eternity, it would have been better for him to never have been born! At the price he must pay for his temporal, earthly blessings, every such "blessing" is really a curse. Every kindness from God that he enjoys on earth will cost him millions of years of hellish agony. During his life he is only being fattened for the slaughter that awaits him, and better if he *had* been born an animal to be slaughtered! Perhaps the "kindest" thing God did for him while he was on earth was to hide from him his unalterable destiny. This kind of "love" is enough to make one's blood run cold. What sentence would any earthly judge bestow upon a person who displayed such "love"?

Piper's Argument

In his explanation of unconditional election, Piper ignores this vast wealth of scriptural argument that contradicts his doctrine, and once again goes

on a search for needles in the haystack. He thinks he finds one in Acts 13:48: "And when the Gentiles [in Pisidian Antioch] heard this [that they could be saved], they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and *as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed*" (emphasis added). This particular verse is certainly not found in the context of any theological explanation of predestination. If one concludes from this one verse that God appoints certain people to eternal life (and thus appoints others to eternal damnation), then one must exalt this verse to the point of nullifying hundreds of other scriptures that would stand in contradiction to it. That would hardly be wise. We should, therefore, adopt an interpretation of this phrase that will make it harmonize with the rest of Scripture rather than contradict it.

I have already shown that, before time, God chose to give eternal life to all who would believe, thus all believers are members of the chosen group. They are appointed to eternal life before time because of God's foreknowledge of their faith. Luke's phrase, "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed," does not prove that a prior unconditional election was the cause of faith in those Gentiles. If I said, "As many as I appointed to wash dishes, washed dishes," does that prove that the *only* reason certain people washed dishes is because I previously appointed them, and thus their own free will had nothing to do with the fact that they washed dishes? May I not have appointed them to wash dishes because of some prior knowledge I possessed about their ability to wash dishes?

Piper's error is that he again uses a biblical phrase that is simply meant to be descriptive to try to prove a cause of salvation, and in so doing, he arrives at a conclusion that contradicts what Scripture plainly teaches is the cause of salvation.

A second possible interpretation is as follows: Note that Piper assigns an interpretation of this phrase based on an assumption, telling us, "Some believed while others did not" (p. 19, par. 4).

This is not at all what Acts 13:48 says. Scripture only says that "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." That doesn't necessarily mean that some believed while others did not. If I said, "As many children who raised their hands were given lollipops," I probably mean that every

child present received a lollipop.

Because Jesus died for *every* Gentile and wants *every* Gentile to be saved, it can be rightly said that God has appointed every Gentile to eternal life. Luke may have simply been reporting that all the Gentiles who had gathered to listen to Paul believed the gospel.

Another Needle

As Piper continues looking for needles in the haystack to support his view, he again resorts to assigning to a single verse an interpretation that fits his doctrine. John 10:26 says, “But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep.” Piper explains that Jesus *didn’t* say, “You are not my sheep because you do not believe,” but rather, “You do not believe because you are not of My sheep.” Thus, the reason these particular people didn’t believe is because God didn’t sovereignly choose them first, thus determining that they would be among His sheep. “Being a sheep is something that God decides for us before we believe,” says Piper (p. 19, par. 5).

Again, Piper makes the error of trying to derive an order in the process of salvation from a verse that is metaphorical and merely meant to be descriptive. If a shepherd says about certain sheep that are grazing among his own flock, “These ones are not white, because they are not of my sheep,” does that prove that the wool of his sheep was black before he obtained them, and then became white *after* they became his sheep? Is the shepherd declaring that the *sole* reason that his sheep have white wool is because they are his sheep? No, the only real conclusion one can draw from such a statement is that the shepherd only has sheep with white wool in his flock. Likewise, Jesus was simply describing His true sheep among the bigger “flock.” His sheep believe. Those who are not of His flock don’t believe. He was not establishing an order in the process of salvation.

I wonder why Piper doesn’t quote the two verses that follow John 10:26 in order to be certain his interpretation fits the context. There we continue reading, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27-28).

Here Jesus continues to describe His relationship with His sheep. He mentions things that they do and things that He does for them. Not only do they believe in Him, but they also hear his voice (because they are near and attentive), and they follow Him (because they have obediently submitted to Him). True Christians believe in, listen to, and obey Jesus. Jesus, like any good shepherd, knows which sheep are His. He gives them eternal life, promises that they won't perish, and also guarantees that they won't be stolen. Clearly we see this is a two-sided relationship, both sides having responsibility.

How would we fare if we used Piper's means of interpreting John 10:26 to interpret Jesus' words regarding a just-converted prostitute, recorded in Luke 7:47?:

“For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for [because] she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

Was Jesus teaching that the reason this prostitute's many sins were forgiven was because she first, prior to being forgiven, "loved much"? Or was Jesus simply describing people who have been forgiven much, identifying them as being people who love God much? The answer is obvious. Thus we should be extremely careful in deriving an order of the process of salvation from John 10:26, grasping for a cause and effect relationship in a statement that was only meant to describe true believers.

Romans 9

Piper next takes us to Romans 9, a favorite of Calvinists, because when certain verses there are detached from their context, they seem to support the Calvinistic idea of the unconditional election of certain individuals. This is exactly what Piper does, citing several of those verses (9:11-12, 15-16). When such verses are interpreted within the context of

the entire book of Romans, however, it becomes obvious that the Calvinistic interpretation of them stands in direct contradiction to the entire letter itself, not to mention the rest of the Bible. So let us take a closer look at the *whole* book of Romans. I will focus on those passages that help prepare us to better understand Paul's points in Romans 9, as well as the many passages that clearly contradict Calvinistic doctrine.

The book of Romans stands out in the New Testament as the most lengthy and detailed defense of the gospel. Paul, the author, defends his divinely-given message that salvation was being withheld from unbelieving Jews (even though they were chosen by God, descendants of Israel, circumcised, and took pride in God's Law) and was being freely granted to believing Gentiles. Such teaching many Jews naturally abhorred and rejected, and so throughout his letter, Paul addressed their various objections. This is obvious to even the casual reader, so I will not take time to enumerate the many evidences of this fact.

Two Pillars of the Gospel

Once his introduction is behind him, Paul continues chapter 1 by focusing on two foundational pillars upon which his gospel is built—the truths of humanity's sinfulness and God's wrath. It is here that we begin to see contradictions to the Calvinistic interpretation of certain verses in Romans 9.

Paul first describes how God's wrath is revealed by His judgment upon sinners who are without excuse before God (see 1:18-23). In fact, Paul plainly declares that people's ever-increasing depravity and slavery to sin is an indication of God's judgment upon them. In the space of just a few sentences, he mentions three times how God "gives sinners over," specifically to "impurity," "degrading passions" and to "a depraved mind" (see 1:24, 26, 28). There is no mistaking Paul: God judges rebels by giving them over to depravity.

In this way, God can be said to be righteously hardening rebels. I suspect that Paul had more in mind than here than just illuminating his readers about one aspect of God's wrath. If he can procure his Jewish readers'

early acceptance of the fact that God righteously hardens Gentile rebels, perhaps they will more easily accept his teaching later on in his letter that God also righteously hardens Jews who reject His Messiah.

Note also that Paul's declarations of man's corruption clearly stand in contradiction to the Calvinistic ideas of total depravity and irresistible grace, as God only "gives over" to depravity those who have first, by their own choice, decided to resist Him and continually yield to sin. *Before* He "gives them over," *they* "suppress[ed] the truth" (1:18), "*they* did not honor" God "or give thanks" (1:21), "*they*...exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures" (1:22-23), "*they* exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (1:25), and "*they* did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer" (1:28, emphases added). Paul thus says, "*Therefore* God gave them over... to impurity...to degrading passions...to a depraved mind" (1:24, 26, 28, emphasis added). These depraved people practice homosexuality as well as many other vices that Paul lists in 1:27-32. Note again that God "gave them over" after they, having had ample opportunity to repent and also being without excuse, decided themselves to continue in their rebellion.

So, although all people are born with a propensity to sin inherited from Adam, they are not born "depraved." God judges those who persist in the path of sin by "giving them over" to depravity. Yet even such depraved sinners are not so depraved that they cannot repent with God's gracious help while He extends His kindness during their lifetimes (see 2:4). Clearly, Paul was not in agreement with the Calvinistic concept of total depravity, and consequently, neither could he be in agreement with the Calvinistic concept of irresistible grace.

Chapter 2

Through the end of chapter 1, Jewish readers of Paul's letter may have been saying "Amen." Surely Paul was only writing about the depraved Gentiles. But the tables begin to turn on any self-righteous Jew in chapter 2. There Paul unmasks the hypocrite who passes judgment on others who sin. Any person who condemns another for wrongdoing testifies

before heaven's court that he knows there is such a thing as right and wrong. Thus, when he does wrong, he stands self-condemned, without excuse before God. Paul points out that people are guilty of condemning others for sins that they themselves practice (see 2:1). What person, for example, who condemns another person for lying, has never lied himself?

Paul goes on to say that everyone knows that God's judgment *rightly* falls upon such people (see 2:2). That is, we all know that such people deserve to be punished, and they would be utterly foolish to think that they will escape God's punishment when they practice sins for which they condemn others. The only thing that keeps them from being immediately punished is God's merciful kindness, which He shows them in hopes of it leading them to repent (see 2:4). But if they don't repent, they will inevitably face God's wrath, which they have been storing up for themselves as they enjoyed God's kindness all their lives (see 2:5).

Paul's words here are, of course, also contrary to the Calvinistic ideas of total depravity, irresistible grace, and unconditional election. Obviously, Paul believed that God has patience with corrupt people who can repent and whom He wants to repent, yet who never do repent, ultimately receiving the full dose of His wrath. Thus, no one is so totally depraved that he cannot repent, and thus neither is *irresistible* grace necessary. Moreover, saved people are not those who are unconditionally elected, but those who by their own choice repent while God is showing them mercy.

Paul goes on to state that because God is *perfectly* fair, He will one day "render to every man according to his deeds" (2:6), which no Jew could debate because Paul was quoting Scripture. God will give immortality, eternal life, glory, honor and peace to everyone who perseveres in doing good and who seeks for glory and honor from God. Those who do evil, who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey God, however, will face His wrath and indignation and suffer tribulation and distress (see 2:7-10).

No Jewish reader could at this point rightly accuse Paul of eliminating the necessity of holiness in order for one to ultimately receive eternal life. Some Jews who opposed Paul's gospel believed that obedience to God was very important, because one earned eternal life by keeping the Law.

Paul's message was different in this respect—he believed that no one could keep the Law who is a slave of sin. One who believes the gospel, however, is supernaturally set free from sin and can keep God's commandments by the power of the indwelling Spirit. Thus, the Law is not nullified by faith as some of Paul's opponents might argue. Rather, as Paul would later declare, "through faith....we establish the Law" (Rom. 3:31).

The fates of eternal life to the righteous and eternal torment to sinners are the fates of Jews as well as Gentiles (see 2:9-10). The reason is because, as Paul says, "there is no partiality with God" (Rom. 2:11). He is perfectly fair. Clearly, this point also stands in direct contradiction to the Calvinistic idea of unconditional election, which completely voids God's impartiality. The God of the Calvinists has favorites—those whom He elects for salvation before the foundation of the world.

Paul expands the concept of God's impartiality to Jews and Gentiles in 2:12-16. God gave the Law only to the Jews, and so He will judge them by the standard of the Law. Paul adds what no Jew can argue against—just because they are hearers of the Law doesn't make them righteous in God's sight. It is the *doers* of the Law who will be justified.

Likewise, God didn't give the Law of Moses to the Gentiles, so He will not judge them by that standard. God did, however, give them all consciences that condemn them when they do what is wrong and commend them when they do what is right. They will be held accountable to that "law in their hearts."

Paul next challenges his Jewish opponents to logically apply to themselves what he has just said. He exposes the common Jew who knows God's Law, boasts in it, and teaches it to others, but who transgresses it himself, and asks him to compare himself to an uncircumcised Gentile who instinctively obeys the Law by following his divinely-given conscience. Such upright Gentiles can rightfully condemn such hypocritical Jews. By his example, Paul exposes the absurdity of the common Jewish belief that their being circumcised somehow made them right before God. He even goes so far as to say that in such a case, God would consider such a hypocritical Jew to be uncircumcised, and such an upright Gentile to be circumcised. The reason is because true

circumcision is of the heart. Paul writes, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God” (2:28-29). A true Jew has had his heart changed by the Spirit and pleases God by his heart obedience.

Within the second chapter, Paul has been setting up his Jewish opponents so they won’t be able to logically argue against his doctrine that God is freely granting salvation to believing Gentiles while rejecting unbelieving Jews. If Jews can be justified by obeying the Law that God gave them, then certainly Gentiles can be justified by obeying the consciences that God gave them. If not, then God would be unfair, and this the Jews had to acknowledge. Now they are set up for the next point of Paul’s argument.

As Paul will next explain in chapter 3, Jews and Gentiles are both “under sin” (3:9), both stand equally condemned before God, and thus neither can obtain salvation by obedience to God’s law. Thus, if either are to be saved, it must be by another way, and if God offers that way to Jews, He must in fairness also offer it to Gentiles. That way, of course, is the way of faith. Thus God can righteously reject unbelieving Jews and righteously accept believing Gentiles, just as much as He can righteously reject unbelieving Gentiles and righteously accept believing Jews. If this is not true, then God is partial, which stands against what Scripture teaches.

Chapter 3

From the start of chapter 3, Paul anticipates an inevitable Jewish objection to what he has just written about uncircumcised Gentiles being accepted by God while circumcised Jews are rejected by Him: “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?” (Rom. 3:1).

Paul responds by saying that Jews are greatly advantaged because they were entrusted with the “oracles of God” (3:2). That is, they were given God’s word in what we call the Old Testament.

Yet some of the Jews to whom God's oracles were given did not believe what God said, for example, those Jews who didn't enter the Promised Land. Paul thus asks, "What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?" (Rom. 3:3). Paul responds to this question by exclaiming, "May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

Here Paul begins to respond to a Jewish objection that he later expands upon in chapter 9. His Jewish opponents apparently argued that if his gospel were true, then God's word had failed (see 9:6), because by Paul's criteria, most of the Jews had failed to obtain the salvation God promised them. Here Paul reminds Jewish readers that it is not God's fault that some Jews didn't or don't believe. Neither does their unbelief nullify God's faithfulness to His promises.

Because all people, Jew and Gentile, stand condemned for their sin and fall short of God's glory, Paul says that "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in [God's] sight" (3:20). The Law doesn't save anyone; it only brings "the knowledge of sin" (3:20) and reveals God's righteousness (see 3:21). God has, however, provided a salvation that is granted by His grace to all sinners, Jew and Gentile, if they will believe in Jesus (see 3:22-23).

Another primary Jewish objection to Paul's gospel is that it made God look unfair or unrighteous, in that He was accepting wicked, sinful Gentiles but rejecting "law-abiding" Jews. But in light of the fact that Jews stood just as condemned before God as Gentiles, Paul's gospel did not make God unrighteous in the least. On the contrary, it made God look perfectly righteous in several ways.

First, because God showed "no distinction" (3:22) between Jews and Gentiles. Since all Jews and Gentiles sinned and stood equally condemned, God made atonement for all their sins, and offered them all, by His grace, the gift of salvation, conditioned on each person's faith. What could be more fair or righteous to Jews and Gentiles?

Second, Paul's gospel vindicated God before those who accused Him of being unrighteous when He showed "forbearance" and "passed over the

sins previously committed” (3:25), that is, when God didn’t immediately punish people’s sins in the past. Paul’s gospel revealed that as Christ hung on the cross, He died for all sins for all time as a “propitiation” (3:25), that is, as a sacrifice that appeased God’s wrath against sin. Thus all sin was punished in Christ, and His sacrifice made it possible for God to show forbearance to sinners without compromising His own righteousness. Apart from Jesus’ substitutionary death, God could have been rightly accused of unrighteousness when He showed forbearance to those who committed sin. Christ’s death is the basis for all mercy He has ever shown.

Third, Paul’s gospel revealed God’s righteousness in that when it was believed by Jews and Gentiles, they were made righteous, legally and practically. Paul’s gospel revealed God’s righteousness in all these ways, and thus the Jews’ objection that his message made God unrighteous was completely unfounded.

Again, it is obvious that what Paul has written in the third chapter stands against Calvinistic doctrine. Calvinism does not uphold God’s righteousness, as it makes God partial to certain people and makes Him unjust. Paul’s gospel made salvation equally accessible to Jews and Gentiles. There is no hint of unconditional election in this third chapter.

Paul asks a final question at the end of chapter 3, an objection that he either anticipates or has heard: “Do we then nullify the Law through faith?” and answers, “May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law” (3:31).

This could be paraphrased, “In light of what I’ve just written, does my gospel of salvation by faith nullify the Law, making words of God Himself meaningless, as some accuse? That, you surely now realize, is an absurd accusation! My gospel doesn’t *nullify* the Law, it *establishes* the Law, because it harmonizes perfectly with, supports and upholds the Law. It reveals God’s righteousness even better than the Law does. It puts the Law in its proper and intended place. It is the fulfillment of many promises, types and shadows found in the Law that pointed to Jesus. It results in people becoming obedient to God’s Law. How could any intelligent person say that my gospel nullifies the Law?!”

Chapter 4

In chapter 4, by quoting Genesis 15:6, Paul proves that Abraham, revered ancestor of all Jews through his son, Jacob, was justified by faith and not by works (see 4:1-3). This is a strong argument in Paul's favor, putting Abraham on his side. Additionally, Paul points out that Abraham was justified *before* he received the rite of circumcision (see 4:10-11), something the Jews considered essential for salvation, if not the very guarantee of salvation. Because Abraham was declared righteous before he received circumcision, this proves that non-circumcised Gentiles can be justified before God without being circumcised. Thus Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised" (4:11). In this way, Abraham becomes a father even to those who are not of his physical lineage, but who follow his faith, and this was even foretold in Scripture when God promised to make him "a father of many nations" (4:17).

Perhaps anticipating that some Jews might retort that Abraham wasn't required to keep the Law for salvation since he lived before God gave the Law of Moses, Paul also cites some words of David, a man who lived under Mosaic Law. David's words also prove that, even under the dispensation of the Mosaic Law, justification was by faith and not works, as he wrote of the blessed man "whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered...whose sin the Lord will not take into account" (4:7-8).

Going a step further, Paul declares that God's promised blessing to Abraham and his descendants was conditioned on faith and not on the Law. Therefore, those who try to inherit that blessing by keeping the Law nullify God's promise to Abraham and his posterity (see 4:13-14). Paul argued this same point in Galatians 3:17: "The Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later [after God's promise to Abraham and his seed], does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise."

So we see that Paul is still addressing Jewish objections to his gospel.

Chapter 5

In the second half of chapter 5, Paul answers yet another objection. Some might say, “How is it possible for *one* man’s act to make salvation possible for *all* people? Paul responds by relating how one man’s act brought death to the entire world, and then compares the negative results of Adam’s sin with the positive results of Jesus’ death (see 5:12-21).

Within his comparison, Paul writes, “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to *all men*, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to *all men*” (5:18, emphasis added). From reading everything else Paul wrote, we can safely assume that he was not asserting here that all people *will* be justified, but that all people *can* be justified through Jesus’ “act of righteousness.” There is no difference between the “all men” who are condemned by Adam’s sin and the “all men” who can be justified by Jesus’ obedience. This, of course, flatly contradicts the Calvinistic idea of unconditional election, as well as the Calvinist idea that Jesus only died for the sins of those predestined to be saved (what Calvinists call the “limited atonement”). If Paul affirms an unconditional election in chapter 9, we would have to wonder why he contradicted himself in chapter 5.

Chapters 6-8

Some of Paul’s adversaries apparently argued that if his doctrine of salvation by grace were true, then it follows that we should continue to sin so God can show us more grace. Similarly, some argued that if we are not under law (as a means of earning our salvation), then we have no motivation not to sin.

Paul annuls these objections by revealing that those who have truly received God’s grace, that is, true believers, have become obedient from their hearts (see 6:17) and have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection (see 6:2-7). They have thus died to sin, are freed from it, and it no longer has dominion over them (see 6:2, 7, 14). Believers are

released from the Law's condemnation by Christ's death (see 7:1-6). Now "we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter" (7:6).

This naturally leads Paul in the second half of chapter 7 to discuss the plight of the Jew who desires to keep the Law but who is still bound by sin (see 7:14-25). A "wretched man" (7:24) is he indeed, and one with whom every Jew who was genuinely attempting to keep the Law could identify. The only one who can set him free from his bondage is Jesus (see 7:24-25).

In chapter 8 Paul continues this theme, highlighting the great advantage gained by those who have been regenerated and are now "in the Spirit," no longer "in the flesh" (8:9). Such people have an obligation to follow the indwelling Spirit, and they are God's own children and heirs (see 8:12-17). They should patiently wait, even if suffering for their faith, for the time when God's plan of salvation will be completely fulfilled, when all of the physical creation, including their own bodies, will be transformed for God's glory (see 8:18-25).

Paul then declares,

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (8:28-30).

This passage Piper highlights later in his chapter on unconditional election (see pp. 21-22), saying that it is "perhaps the most important text of all in relation to the teaching of unconditional election" (p. 21, prgh. 3). He then attempts to show that what this scripture plainly states, it doesn't actually mean, because it clearly contradicts Calvinistic theology.

Anyone who reads this passage without a Calvinistic bias would conclude that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him, that is, the believers. This is demonstrated by the fact that those

whom God foreknows will love Him, He predestines to become conformed to the image of Jesus, He calls them through the gospel, He justifies them, and He ultimately glorifies them.

Piper attempts to prove that when Paul used the word “foreknew” in regard to the believers, the actual meaning of the word “foreknew” in this context is “foreordained.” The flaw in his logic that he uses to prove his point is so glaring it is almost embarrassing to expose it. But expose it I must.

Piper ignores the fact that Paul is writing from the beginning of verses 28 and 29 *exclusively* about people who are saved. Paul defines them as those who “love God,” those who are “called according to His purpose” and those whom God “foreknew.” Paul is clearly not writing about all people, but only those who are Christians.

Piper points out that Paul says in verse 30 that those whom God calls He justifies. Piper then says that this calling which Paul mentions is not the general call of repentance given to all people because Paul says it *always* results in justification. Since not everyone who hears the general call ends up justified, this call of which Paul speaks here must be, according to Piper, the *Calvinistic* call of “irresistible grace,” the call that is given only to those unconditionally elected for salvation. Piper ignores the fact that God’s general call of salvation always results in the justification of those whom God foreknew would believe, which are, of course, the only people about whom Paul was writing.

Based on his conclusion that Paul was writing about people who are called by God’s irresistible grace, Piper then goes back to the beginning of verse 29 and redefines what Paul must have meant when he spoke of those whom God foreknew. Since Paul was “obviously” writing about only those who are unconditionally elected and irresistibly drawn, when he used the word “foreknew” in verse 29, it must be equivalent to the word “foreordained”! What logic! What nonsense!

Again, the truth of the matter is that the general call of the gospel always does result in the justification of those whom God foreknew would believe, which are the only ones Paul was speaking of in this passage from the beginning. It is just that simple. Thus Piper’s Calvinistic

argument collapses.

Moreover, foreknowledge and foreordination are not the same things. I might foreknow that it is going to rain, but that doesn't prove that I foreordained that it would rain. God foreknows who will be saved because He foreknows who will believe. How full is the Bible of events that God foreknew and foretold by prophecy but did not foreordain! How can foreknowledge be said to be equivalent to foreordination?

Note also that Paul says nothing in the above passage about God predestining anyone to salvation, but only to Him predestining certain people to be conformed to Christ's image whom He foreknew. In that sense, God predestines Christians. Foreknowing believers, He predestines them to become like Christ.

Incidentally, God calls people through the gospel, not by irresistible grace (although He does draw them by a grace that is resistible). Paul told the Thessalonian believers, "He *called* you *through* our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thes. 2:14, emphasis added).

When Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica, did he only preach to people who were pre-selected to be saved? No, many who heard the gospel in Thessalonica rejected it (see Acts 17:1-12). *Everyone* in Thessalonica was called by God through the gospel. So when Paul wrote that the Thessalonians were "called through [his] gospel," he certainly didn't think that all the Thessalonians who were called were automatically justified.

Interestingly, one sentence before Paul wrote that God called the Thessalonians through the gospel, he wrote, "God has *chosen* you from the beginning for salvation *through* sanctification by the Spirit *and faith in the truth*" (2 Thes. 2:13, emphasis added). Paul could say that God had chosen the Thessalonians to whom he was writing because God has chosen from the beginning to save all who would have "faith in the truth" under the drawing of God's Spirit. Indeed, as Jesus said, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). All those who believe are among God's chosen.

Chapter 9

Paul begins this chapter by expressing his sincere love for his fellow Jews, even though most of them have rejected his gospel (see 9:1-3). Shortly thereafter, he declares that to the Jews “*belongs* the adoption as sons” (9:4, emphasis added). This statement clearly contradicts the Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional election. If Paul believed that God had selected only certain Jews for salvation, he would have never made such a statement. Clearly, he believed that adoption into God’s family was something that belonged to every Jew, but each individual Jew must believe in Jesus if he is to enjoy the adoption that belongs to him.

If he does not enjoy his rightful adoption, it is not God’s fault. Paul declares this fact just one verse later, stating, “But it is not as though the word of God has failed” (9:6). God’s word never fails. Paul’s Jewish opponents apparently argued that if his gospel were true, then God’s word had failed, because by Paul’s criteria, most of the Jews had failed to obtain the salvation God had promised to them.

Paul knows God’s word well enough, however, to know that God did not promise salvation to every physical descendant of Israel or to every Jew who attempts to keep the Law, but only to those who believe. Moreover, Paul knows God’s word well enough to know that God had even foretold through the Prophets that very few Jews would believe the gospel, while many Gentiles would embrace it. And this is what the 9th chapter of Romans is all about.

Directly after Paul declares that God’s word has not failed, he states, “For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel” (9:6). Paul can only mean that just because one is a physical descendant of Israel doesn’t mean that he is a *true* Israelite. No Jew should rely upon his physical lineage to guarantee his salvation, any more than he should rely upon his physical circumcision, as Paul had earlier warned (see 2:25-29).

Paul continues by expanding on this idea:

Neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named." That is [here is Paul's explanation of what he just said], *it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants*. For this is a word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son"(9:7-9, emphasis added).

Again, the *primary* point is that physical lineage does not guarantee blessing from God, as proven by the case of Ishmael. Ishmael was a physical descendant of Abraham who did not receive the blessing given to Isaac.

Paul draws a further parallel with this example to his contemporary Jewish readers. They may either be like Isaac or Ishmael in this respect: Believing Jews are like Isaac, "children of the promise," who receive the blessing by faith. Unbelieving Jews are like Ishmael, "children of the flesh," who are only physical descendants.

Obviously, like all comparisons, this one is imperfect, and there are many dissimilarities that could be mentioned between Isaac and believers and Ishmael and unbelievers. Paul only draws out one similarity. His point is that God has chosen to bless only those who have faith in His promise. No Jew should rely on his physical lineage to obtain God's blessing. And God certainly has the right to determine whom He accepts and whom He rejects. Paul continues:

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom. 9:10-13).

This is one of the passages Piper points out, and he claims that Paul is teaching that believers are unconditionally elected before birth just as Jacob was unconditionally elected before his birth. Piper unfortunately neglects the context that we have just considered.

Once more, Paul is proving that one's lineage does not guarantee blessing from God. He highlights another one of God's previous choices, when God made a choice in regard to Jacob over Esau. Esau was a physical descendant of Isaac who did not receive the blessing given to Jacob.

And once again, Paul draws an additional parallel with this example to his contemporary readers: *God's choosing of Jacob was definitely not based on his works*. That is obvious to anyone who reads Jacob's life story. He was a sinful, selfish deceiver, and God knew what he would be like before he was born. Yet God chose him just as He has chosen to bless sinful Gentiles who believe. How could Jewish readers legitimately object to Paul's doctrine that God had chosen to bless sinful Gentiles when their forefather, Israel, was no different than any sinful Gentile?

Paul is in no way trying to convince his readers that the reason some are saved and some are unsaved is because God has pre-selected only some to salvation, as in the cases of Isaac and Jacob! Neither Jacob nor Isaac were pre-selected to be saved, and there is no scriptural proof that either Ishmael or Esau died unsaved. Ishmael and Esau were simply not chosen to be in the messianic lineage. Paul is illustrating that God has the sovereign right to make His choices, regardless of what any man thinks, and that neither physical lineage nor doing some good works guarantees His blessing.

Incidentally, when God told Rebekah why her twins were struggling in her womb, God said to her, "Two *nations* are in your womb; and two *peoples* shall be separated from your body; and one *people* shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23, emphasis added). This was a foretelling of what would happen to the posterity of her sons, not the sons themselves, and we know, of course, that what God said did not come to pass in her sons, but in their posterity. Likewise, when God said through His prophet Malachi, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated," He was speaking not of the individuals Jacob and Esau, but of their posterity, as Malachi 1:2-5 reveals. In Paul's analogy, Jacob corresponded to those whom God had chosen before time to love—believers. Esau corresponded to those God had chosen before time to hate—unbelievers.

Again, like all comparisons, this one is imperfect. We must be cautious that we don't try to read more into than Paul intended, and the context helps us to do that. Paul's example of Jacob or Esau cannot be rightfully interpreted that God chose Jacob for salvation and Esau for damnation or that God has done anything similar with any individual before or after them. Otherwise, we take Paul's words out of their context and make him contradict himself in his very next sentence, which says, "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!" (9:14).

Paul is masterfully exposing the fallacy of the Jew's argument. They said it was unjust for God to show saving mercy to the Gentiles that He withheld from His own people. Paul has just proved otherwise from their own history. If they say Paul's message makes God unjust, then they must also admit that God was unjust in regard to His choices of Isaac and Jacob over Ishmael and Esau. Paul's opponents are cornered. *Checkmate!*

An unjust God is an impossibility in Paul's mind, and so it should be in everyone's mind. If God did choose Jacob for salvation and Esau for damnation before they were born, then God is *very* unjust! Who can, however, accuse God of injustice just because He chose Jacob rather than Esau to be in the messianic lineage? God has such a right. And who can accuse Him of injustice if He chooses to show grace to sinners who become humble believers and chooses to withhold His grace from proud sinners who attempt to earn their salvation? There is no injustice in that. But there is indeed injustice in God if He unconditionally elects some to salvation and some to damnation.

Paul continues:

For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires (9:15-18).

To Paul, salvation is not a matter of to whom God shows justice. Rather, it is a matter of to whom God shows mercy. If every person received God's due justice, every person would be condemned, because all have sinned, a point Paul had made earlier in this letter. So the only question is, *To whom, if anyone, is God showing mercy in salvation?* His answer, of course, is that God shows mercy in saving anyone who believes, by which He does not compromise His fairness to all.. He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and no one has any right to find fault with Him for showing mercy to whom He chooses. To find fault with God for showing mercy to believing Gentiles is to judge God and exalt one's self.

Just as God has the right to show mercy to whomever He desires, He also has the right to harden whomever He desires. No one can rightfully find fault for Him hardening anyone He desires. Thankfully, because God is righteous, He hardens only those who have repeatedly rejected His mercy. Paul points specifically to Pharaoh, whom God showed incredible mercy over a period of time (and nobody can argue against this). On at least three occasions, Scripture says that Pharaoh hardened his heart, and thus God decided to show him no further mercy, and Scripture begins to say that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (see Ex. 7:13, 22: 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34-35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). Who can find fault with God for that?

Likewise, God had shown *incredible* mercy to the Jews, as Paul would soon say in 10:21, quoting Isaiah 65:1: "All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." Certainly God had the right to harden them now just as He did Pharaoh of old. Paul will soon show that the Prophets predicted the Jews' rejection of Christ and God's hardening of them because of it (see 9:27-29; 33; 10:19-21; 11:7-10).

Calvinists misuse Paul's words in this passage (and Piper is no exception), saying that God has compassion on some and hardens others for no other reason than His good pleasure. That makes God unjust, the *very thing Paul was arguing against*, and contradicts his summarizing statement to this entire section of scripture: "For God has shut up *all* in disobedience that He might show mercy to *all*" (11:32). God will indeed have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and, because He is perfectly just, He extends His saving mercy to all, Jews and Gentiles. (Clearly, Paul is writing in this passage about God's *saving* mercy, and

not about His supposed “common” mercy.)

Anticipating the consequent objection to what he has just said, Paul writes, “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?” (Rom 9:19).

If God actually hardens rebels, then why does He still find fault with them? is the question posed. The answer is that God *righteously* hardens rebels. He hardens them as a means of judgment upon them. Paul, however doesn’t mention this at this point, but sharply rebukes anyone who would dare find fault with God for hardening anyone. We are not the judge of God; He is our judge. Anyone who has been hardened by God cannot rightly point a finger of accusation against Him. God has the right to do whatever He desires with us, and thank God that He has shown us all incredible mercy in order that we might repent and be saved.

Paul continues defending God’s right to do what He pleases with what is His:

The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, *not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles* (9:19-24, emphasis added).

I italicized the last part of 9:24 just to remind us that Paul is still writing about the Jewish controversy about the justice of God in saving believing Gentiles while rejecting unbelieving Jews.

Paul is not, and cannot, be attempting to persuade his readers that God pre-selects some to be “vessels of wrath” and others to be “vessels of mercy,” as that would contradict everything He has said about God’s justice. Rather, Paul is emphasizing that God has been extremely patient

with those who were “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (9:22). These “vessels” were not “prepared sovereignly by God,” but simply “prepared,” or “ready” for destruction because of their own sinfulness. Paul is not saying that only a certain percentage of people are “vessels of wrath.” *All* people are such vessels prior to their repentance and regeneration, as Paul has made abundantly clear in earlier chapters of Romans.

Paul explains that the reason God was so patient with vessels that were so worthy of His judgment was so “He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory [“beforehand” because He foreknew who would believe; see 8:29], even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles” (9:23). Clearly, in opposition to what some Jews wanted to believe, Paul believed that the “vessels of mercy” include Gentiles whom God has called through the gospel. That is still the primary point of this chapter. To buttress his point, Paul offers proof that God foretold through His prophets that God would save Gentiles but that there would only be a remnant of Jews who would be saved:

As He says also in Hosea, “I will call those who were not My people [Gentiles], ‘My people,’ And her who was not beloved, ‘beloved.’” And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, ‘you are not My people,’ There they shall be called sons of the living God.” And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; for the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, thoroughly and quickly.” And just as Isaiah foretold, “Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become as Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah” (9:25-29).

Finally, we arrive at Paul’s summary of this entire 9th chapter. Here it becomes even more clear that Paul has all along been refuting the Jewish objection to his doctrine that God was accepting believing Gentiles and rejecting unbelieving Jews:

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that

law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." (9:30-33).

Paul's point is so obvious that one wonders how any Calvinist can miss it. Many Gentiles attained righteousness while many Jews did not, because they did not pursue it by faith as did the Gentiles. And God had foretold this would happen through Isaiah, saying that the Messiah would be a stumbling stone to some, but *anyone* who would believe in Him would not be disappointed. Isaiah foretold of a salvation that would be available to anyone by faith.

Chapters 10 and 11

Paul devotes two more chapters to the Jewish/Gentile issue, both of which stand in contradiction to Calvinistic doctrine. He begins chapter 10 by stating that his prayer to God is for the salvation of his fellow Jews (see 10:1). Had Paul been a Calvinist, he would never have prayed such a prayer, knowing that the salvation or damnation of every person was already determined before the foundation of the world. Thus, there is no reason to pray for anyone's salvation. Any Calvinist who prays for the salvation of other people is inconsistent with his own theology. Even if he prays, "Lord, whenever it pleases You, bestow Your irresistible grace upon those whom You have predestined to be saved," his prayer accomplishes nothing. God will do what he has requested regardless of his request.

In 10:4, Paul again affirms the universal opportunity of salvation: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to *everyone* who believes" (emphasis added). He then pulls out an arsenal of scriptures to seal his case. In so doing, he repeatedly declares that salvation is available to all in 10:11-13, quoting the prophets Isaiah and Joel:

For the Scripture says, "*Whoever* believes in Him will not be disappointed." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of *all*, abounding in riches for *all* who call upon Him; for

“*Whoever* will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved” (emphasis added).

The very word “whoever” which Paul uses twice in this passage contradicts Calvinistic theology, because it implies that individuals can make a choice. To Calvinists, totally depraved people can’t choose to repent or believe, and *only* those who are unconditionally elected, irresistibly drawn and sovereignly regenerated will ever do so. Thus, the concept implied by the word “whoever” does not exist in the Calvinist system.

Paul again puts the blame on the Jews themselves for not being saved, quoting from the most well-known messianic chapter in the Old Testament, Isaiah 53: “Lord, who has *believed* our report?” (Is. 53:1, emphasis added). Had they believed the report of the Messiah in Isaiah’s 53rd chapter, any of them could have been saved.

Paul then quotes Deuteronomy 32:21, where God said that He would make His people jealous and angry by “a nation without understanding” (10:19). Paul reveals a few verses later that he was following God’s example in this (see 11:11), attempting to “move to jealousy” some of his “fellow-countrymen and save some of them” (11:14). Paul believed that it was possible for him (and God) to do something that would motivate fellow Jews to believe and be saved. Calvinism’s doctrines of total depravity, irresistible grace and unconditional election all melt in the light of such truth.

Paul again quotes Isaiah to prove that God planned to save Gentiles (see 10:20) and had extended His merciful hand to His own “disobedient and obstinate people” (10:21). Once more the implication is that God wanted Jews to be saved, but they would not repent.

Lest anyone think Paul thought that God had completely rejected the Jews, Paul begins the 11th chapter by refuting that idea, first pointing to himself as proof that God had not rejected the descendants of Israel. Then he cites an Old Testament example of an ancient Israelite who thought he might be the only true follower of Jehovah remaining on the earth:

God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, they have torn down Thine altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.” But what is the divine response to him? “I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (11:2-4).

Notice that God said He had kept seven thousand men for Himself, but they were men who had made the decision not to bow their knee to Baal. God made a decision based upon their decision, not the other way around. Just like Elijah, who by his own free will had decided to serve God and not Baal, so there were seven thousand others like him.

Paul then makes an application of this story to his contemporary situation: “In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice” (11:5). That is, just as in Elijah’s day, God had graciously chosen to keep for Himself a remnant of Jews. They consist of those who believe. Paul immediately emphasizes this condition of acceptance with God in his very next sentence: “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (11:6). Those who attempt to earn salvation by their works are excluded from being among God’s chosen group. He has determined to show grace to those who believe.

Paul continues:

What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day.” And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling block and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened to see not, and bend their backs forever” (11:7-10).

The majority of Israelites had not obtained the salvation they were seeking, with the exception of those who were *chosen*. Ripped from its context and interpreted with a Calvinistic bias, one could use this scripture as a proof-text for unconditional election. But when we read it within its context without a Calvinistic bias, we easily see that Paul is

writing about a *conditional* election. That is, God has chosen to save those who believe. They are His true chosen people.

Incidentally, note that Paul clearly stated that the Jews had been seeking salvation, but had not obtained it, because, as we know, they had been seeking it by works. This, of course, contradicts Calvinism's doctrine of total depravity. The unsaved Jews of whom Paul wrote were not so totally depraved that they couldn't attempt to obey God and seek salvation.

Paul writes that those who are not among God's chosen, that is, those who do not believe, God has hardened. This subject of God's righteous hardening of rebels has already surfaced in 1:21-32 and 9:15-18. But has God hardened Christ-rejecting Jews to the point that it is now impossible for them to repent and believe? No, indeed, as Paul makes ever so clear in the very next paragraph:

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (11:11-15).

So far from stating that God has completely rejected the Jews, Paul declares that by saving Gentiles, God is attempting to move Jews to jealousy that they might be motivated to receive His free salvation. Again, this stands in direct contradiction to Calvinistic theology. If some Jews were predestined to be saved and others to be damned, God would have no reason to try to make Jews jealous by showing grace to Gentiles in hopes that Jews would be saved.

Paul also declares that, if the Jewish rejection of Christ has resulted in spiritual riches for the Gentiles, what might happen when the Jews ultimately receive Christ, as the Scripture has foretold they will? Their future acceptance of Him will be "life from the dead" (11:15), probably a reference to the future resurrection and the beginning of Christ's

millennial reign on Earth. Paul develops this theme a little later in this chapter:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (11:25-29).

By these words, Paul completes his refutation of the Jewish objection that God’s word had failed if his gospel were true (see 9:6). Paul believed that God’s promise of salvation to the Jews would ultimately be fulfilled when “the fullness of the Gentiles [had] come in” (11:25), when the Jews would finally, in mass, believe in Jesus. For now, however, Paul said that a “partial hardening” had happened to Israel. This was not because God arbitrarily decided to harden certain Israelites simply because of His good pleasure, but because He had righteously hardened those who refused to believe in His Messiah. Again, He had not hardened them to the point of making it impossible for them to believe, because He was at the same time attempting to attract them to believe by making them jealous of the Gentiles who believed. If God had determined to harden certain Jews because they were not predestined to be saved, why would He attempt to motivate them to believe by making them jealous of Gentiles?

Moreover, why would God *attempt* to make anyone believe (in this case, by trying to make Jews jealous of Gentiles)? If people are only saved when God bestows a grace that is irresistible upon those pre-ordained to be saved, then God would make no such *attempts* that leave room for possible failure and that are inconsistent with His sole means of saving people. Making certain people jealous in order to motivate them to believe in Jesus is contradictory to the Calvinistic ideas of total depravity, irresistible grace and unconditional election.

Further contradiction against Calvinistic doctrine is found in chapter 11.

Drawing an analogy of a tree and its branches with God's family tree of salvation, Paul writes,

But if some of the [Jewish] branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive [a Gentile], were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. *And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again.* For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? (11:17-24, emphasis added).

Again we see that Paul believed that God would graft individual Jews into the salvation tree *if they would believe*. It was up to them, not God. Had Paul been a Calvinist, he could not have written what we did. He could only have said, "God will graft them in again if God wills for them to be grafted in and gives them the gift of faith."

Note also that Paul warned that genuinely saved Gentiles could forfeit their salvation if they stopped believing. Naturally, such a thing wouldn't be possible if unconditional election were true. If God unconditionally elected a person to be saved, then once God's irresistible grace had been bestowed upon that person, he would be permanently saved with no chance of forfeiting his salvation. One who is "grafted in" cannot be "cut off" in the Calvinistic system, yet Paul believed one "grafted in" could be "cut off." Furthermore, according to Calvinism, one who was "grafted in" and then "cut off" could never have been "grafted in" in the first place. Paul believed otherwise.

In conclusion, if Paul was affirming the Calvinistic doctrine of *Unconditional Election* in Romans 9, then he was a complete idiot,

because he contradicted his own doctrine repeatedly throughout the book of Romans, and we should thus toss his writings out with the rubbish.

Ephesians 1:3-6

The only other scripture that Piper uses to defend the idea of unconditional election is Ephesians 1:3-6, a passage that, like many others, refers to believers as being chosen before the foundation of the world. Calvinists often use such verses to prove their theory of unconditional election, but they fail to notice that Paul never says anything about God's choice being *unconditional*. And they ignore the multitude of scriptures that unequivocally say that God's choice of people is *conditional*.

For example, Paul later writes in Ephesians that “by grace *you have been saved through faith*; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works” (Eph. 2:8-9, emphasis added). The salvation that God has so graciously offered to us is conditioned upon our faith, and not our works. What could be more obvious? In order to be chosen by God and saved, we must have faith. Because God foreknows what every person will do, He knows who will have faith and who will not. So those who have faith are chosen before the foundation of the world.

Thus we see how unscriptural the idea of an unconditional election is. Any person who takes the whole of Scripture into consideration will not conclude that God pre-selects some individuals for salvation and others for damnation. Only those who ignore the majority of what Scripture teaches and focus on certain out-of-context Calvinistic “proof texts” could arrive at such a conclusion.

3. Perseverance of the Saints

Because Calvinists believe that God shows His irresistible grace to totally depraved people whom He has unconditionally elected before time, Calvinists have no choice but to believe that it is impossible for a genuinely-saved person to forfeit his salvation. This is what the Calvinistic doctrine of the *Perseverance of the Saints* is all about. True saints will persevere in faith, and if they don't, they were never truly saved in the first place, according to Calvinists.

Piper certainly holds this view. Amazingly, however, at the start of his chapter about *Perseverance of the Saints*, he states,

Election is unconditional, but glorification is not. There are many warnings in Scripture that those who do not hold fast to Christ can be lost in the end (p. 23, prgh. 2).

Piper is correct in observing that there are many warnings in Scripture addressed to those who do not hold fast to Christ. Indeed, such people *will* be lost in the end. It is astounding, however, that Piper cannot see the glaring contradiction in what he says. Clearly, if a person is genuinely saved due to God's unconditional election and irresistible grace, then there is no possibility of him losing his salvation. Thus, if election is unconditional, *glorification must of necessity also be unconditional*. If one is elected, he must by definition eventually be glorified. This very truth Piper has already declared one paragraph earlier:

It follows from what was just said [Piper's interpretation of Romans 8:28-33] that the people of God *will* persevere. The foreknown are predestined, the predestined are called, the called are justified, and the justified are glorified. No one is lost from this group. To belong to this people is to be eternally secure (p. 23, prgh. 1).

How can it be true that the elect will *certainly* be glorified and the elect *may not* be glorified? Both can't be true, yet Piper says otherwise! He blatantly contradicts himself in the space of a few sentences.

Moreover, logic dictates that if people are saved due to God's unconditional election and irresistible grace, there is no sound reason for Scripture to warn anyone to persevere in faith. Those who *are* genuinely

saved *will* persevere in faith and *cannot* do otherwise. They need no encouragement, because their salvation has been guaranteed since the foundation of the world. Likewise, those who are only phony believers have no reason to be encouraged, because their faith isn't genuine, and it is certain that they *won't* persevere, because their damnation has been guaranteed since the foundation of the world. To encourage such a person is to encourage him to remain deceived a little longer, until he discovers the inevitable—he has been predestined to be damned, and there is no reason for him to attempt to persevere in faith. His faith is bogus.

That is why it is virtually impossible for a consistent Calvinist to have absolute certainty of his salvation until his final breath, because he must always live with the fear that his faith may prove to be bogus if he doesn't persevere in faith until death.

Again, if unconditional election is true, conditional glorification *cannot* be true. If conditional glorification is true (which it is), unconditional election *cannot* be true. Yet Piper repeatedly maintains that both are true. For example, he writes:

We do not breathe easy after a person has prayed to receive Christ, as though we can be assured from our perspective that they are now beyond the reach of the evil one. There is a fight of faith to be fought. We must endure to the end in faith if we are to be saved (p. 23, prgh. 4).

Here Piper says that a person who has prayed to receive Christ is not “beyond the reach of the evil one.” But if that person is one of those who was predestined to be damned, he has not been truly saved in the first place and his prayer was ineffectual. He never escaped Satan's clutches. If, on the other hand, the person is among those predestined to be saved, then there is no possibility of his forfeiting his salvation. And if *he*, being elected, is *not* beyond the reach of the evil one (as Piper says), then Satan is more powerful than God, and Piper has voided God's sovereignty, something no good Calvinist should do!

A few paragraphs later, Piper reverses his position again, writing,

God's elect cannot be lost. This is why we believe in eternal security—namely, the eternal security of the elect. The implication is that God will so work that those whom he has chosen for eternal salvation will be enabled by him to persevere in faith to the end..." (p. 24, prgh. 7).

But if this is true, why are there so many scriptural warnings to believers against falling away from the faith, many of which Piper lists (e.g., Mark 13:13; 1 Cor. 15:1-2; Col. 1:21-23; 2 Tim. 2:11-12; Rev. 2:7, 10-11, 17, 25-26; 3:5, 11-12, 21)? If true believers can't fall away, why would Jesus and Paul warn them about what can't possibly happen?

The truth is, Scripture repeatedly warns believers against falling away because it is possible for genuine believers to fall away. For the same reason, Scripture also repeatedly admonishes believers to continue in the faith. All of such scriptures stand in direct contradiction to the Calvinistic doctrine of *Perseverance of the Saints*.

Piper then quotes from Jesus' words in John 10:26-30 to prove that the elect cannot be lost. This passage of Scripture is the favorite of just about all who believe in eternal security, whether they are Calvinists or not:

But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

This passage of scripture, of course, is not the only passage of scripture in the Bible. It highlights the faithfulness of Christ, but notice that it also mentions some characteristics of those to whom Christ is faithful: Jesus' sheep hear His voice and *follow* Him. *They* are the ones who shall never perish or be snatched out of His hand. This fits perfectly with the testimony of the rest of Scripture. As long as we continue in faith, as evidenced by our following Jesus, we need not fear that we will perish or be snatched out of our Father's hand. If we stop following Jesus, we are no longer His sheep.

This scripture, like so many others, teaches a *conditional* eternal security.

That is, we must continue to follow Jesus to ultimately be saved. Yet Piper uses this scripture to buttress his view of *unconditional* eternal security which stands in direct contradiction to his view of *conditional* glorification, which is nothing less than *conditional* eternal security! Piper believes in both *unconditional* eternal security (based on the doctrine of *unconditional* election) and *conditional* eternal security (based on the doctrine of *conditional* glorification). He is a very inconsistent Calvinist.

In this same chapter, Piper reverses his position again. Writing about believers who fall away, Piper says,

The fact that such a thing is possible [believers falling away] is precisely why the ministry of the Word in every local church must contain many admonitions to the church members to persevere in faith and not be entangled in those things which could possibly strangle them and *result in their condemnation* (p. 25, prgh. 3, emphasis added).

I couldn't agree more with that statement. But Piper again contradicts himself. After telling us that it is impossible for the elect to be lost, Piper now tells us that we must admonish church members to persevere in faith and not be entangled in those things which could *result in their condemnation!* But do these church members have a genuine faith? If yes, then they are among the elect and it is *impossible* for them to be ultimately condemned (according to Piper and all other Calvinists)! They need no admonishing. Or, is their faith bogus? If yes, then they are currently not saved and need no admonishing to *continue* in a faith that isn't genuine. They need to be saved, but will only be if they, according to Calvinism, have been unconditionally elected. And if they are *not* among those elect, then it is impossible for them *not* to be condemned (according to Piper and all other Calvinists)! We deceive such people even more if we encourage them to persevere in faith, because we give them a false hope that they are currently genuinely saved!

In summary, we see that the Calvinistic doctrine of the *Perseverance of the Saints* is, for the Calvinist, an absolutely necessary doctrine, even though it is unbiblical. If God bestows His irresistible grace on totally depraved people whom He has unconditionally elected, then it would have to be, of necessity, impossible for any of those people to forfeit the

salvation that God gave them against their totally depraved wills. They are, of course, robots from start to finish. And it can be no other way in Calvin's system of theology.

However, if people possess wills that are free enough to repent and believe under God's prevenient grace, and if God has chosen from the foundation of the world to give eternal life to all who will believe, then it stands to reason that it is possible for regenerate people to fall away from faith by the exercise of their free wills, just as the New Testament repeatedly teaches. Because conditional glorification is indeed true, then unconditional election *cannot* be true. If there is an election (which there is) then it must be conditional. Thus the Calvinistic doctrine of *Unconditional Election* falls with the Calvinistic doctrine of *Perseverance of the Saints*.

4. Limited Atonement

Finally we come to the L of the TULIP acronym, which stands for *Limited Atonement*. Because Calvinists believe that God unconditionally elected before time only certain people to be saved, Calvinists are thus faced with some difficult questions: *Why does Scripture say that Jesus died for everyone?* and *Why would Jesus die for those who are not predestined to be saved, but who are predestined to be damned?*

The non-Calvinist has no such questions to wrestle with. Because God wants every person to repent and believe, Jesus died for all, making it possible for anyone who repents and believes in the Lord Jesus to have eternal life through His substitutionary sacrifice. It is just that simple.

The Calvinist solves his dilemma by claiming that Jesus did indeed die for everyone, but that He died in a different way for the elect than for the non-elect. For the elect, Jesus purchased "saving grace," which results in their being granted everything that was needed to save them, including Calvinism's irresistible grace, regeneration, the gifts of repentance and faith, and so on. For the non-elect (those predestined to damnation)

Jesus died that they might enjoy only “common grace,” that is, the mercy and blessings that every person enjoys during his life. It is on this basis that Calvinists like Piper interpret Paul’s words that God “is the Savior of all men, especially of believers” (1 Tim. 4:10). To Piper, Jesus saves all men from the immediate eternal punishment they deserve all during the time they are allotted to live on the earth, but He saves only the elect from eternal punishment after they die (see *Piper*, p. 14, prgh. 6).

I hardly think, however, that this would make Jesus much of a “savior” to the non-elect, as it would have been better for them to never have been born than that they “enjoy” such a temporal “salvation.” Every second of “common grace” will cost them billions of years in hell where they will be tortured forever. The “common grace” that God extends to those predestined to be eternally damned makes Jesus more of a sadistic, deranged maniac than a savior to them. (What would *you* think of a person who conceives children with the intention of being kind to them for five years and then torturing them for seventy?)

Thus, the Calvinistic interpretation of 1 Timothy 4:10 is unnatural, forced and far-fetched. A more natural interpretation would be that since Jesus died for *all* people, He is the Savior of *all* men, but especially believers, because they receive and enjoy the benefits of the salvation He offers to all men. This interpretation would harmonize much better with Paul’s earlier words in the same epistle, where he wrote, “God our Savior, who desires *all* men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4, emphasis added).

In contrast to the Calvinistic view which says that God offers His saving grace to only a select few, the apostle Paul declared that God offers His saving grace to everyone:

For the *grace* of God has appeared, bringing *salvation* to *all* men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age (Tit. 2:11-12, emphasis added).

Piper’s Arguments

Piper claims that the non-Calvinist view of Christ's atonement is incompatible with the doctrines of total depravity and irresistible grace, (see p. 13., prgh. 5 through p. 14., prgh. 3), and he is entirely correct, because those two doctrines themselves are erroneous. Piper states that if Christ's atonement only purchased the *potential* of salvation for sinners, there is no way *anyone* could be saved, because people would be left to overcome their total depravity by their own power and regenerate themselves apart from God's irresistible grace that was purchased by Christ on the cross. Since I have already shown the grave errors of the Calvinistic doctrines of *Total Depravity* and *Irresistible Grace*, there is really no need to argue against Piper's flawed logic here. His logic is built on false doctrines. God doesn't save people by bestowing on them irresistible grace, and no one needs to overcome Calvinistic total depravity because there is no such thing as total depravity by the Calvinistic definition. No one needs to regenerate himself because regeneration does not precede faith. God regenerates those who believe, as Scripture plainly says.

Furthermore, to imply that non-Calvinists believe that Christ's atonement only purchases the *potential* of salvation for sinners is very misleading. Christ's atonement does much more than that. It purchases for everyone what is necessary for their salvation—forgiveness, regeneration, eternity in heaven, and so on. It does not, however, purchase the forcing of people against their wills to believe in Christ, as that is not God's desire or His plan. God has given every person a free will because it is His will that each individual exercise the right to believe in Christ or reject Christ. If God wanted robots, He would have created robots. But He didn't want robots. He wants a family that loves Him. Apart from freedom of the will, love is impossible.

Jesus died for every person's sins, but that doesn't automatically mean that everyone will be saved (as Piper erroneously argues would be true if Jesus atoned for everyone's sins). Every individual must receive salvation by believing in the Lord Jesus. When people believe, then what Christ accomplished for them becomes effectual in their lives. This is the only conclusion we can rightfully draw from Scripture that tells us that Jesus died for everyone's sins and yet also tells that not everyone will be saved.

Is it true that God extends His saving grace to only a select group of unconditionally elected people? Not according to the apostle John, who believed that Jesus' atonement was not limited for the saving of some, but accomplished on behalf of every person in the world:

And He Himself [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, *but also for those of the whole world* (1 John 2:2, emphasis added).

The word *propitiation* means "the appeasement of wrath." John plainly declared that Jesus appeased the wrath of God, not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world. What could be more plain?

In regard to this verse that so obviously contradicts the Calvinistic idea of a limited atonement, Piper attempts to convince us that John must have meant something other than what he wrote. John must have meant, claims Piper, that Jesus not only appeased God's wrath on behalf of his little group of Christians, but also for the sins of the rest of the Christians scattered all over the world! (see p. 15, prgh. 7). So, according to Piper, the "whole world" *really* means "the children of God scattered throughout the whole world" (p. 16, prgh. 4). But that is a forced and unnatural interpretation and a redefinition of terms. Are we really to believe that the Christians to whom John wrote thought that Jesus didn't atone for the sins of all believers around the world, and that John wrote to correct their misunderstanding? Does Piper think his readers are that stupid? And why doesn't Piper use the same redefinition of the phrase "whole world" when John uses it later on in the same epistle, in 1 John 5:19? There we read:

We know that we are of God, and the *whole world* lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19, emphasis added).

Was John saying that all the other Christians outside his little group were not of God and that they were lying in the power of Satan? The answer is obvious (see also 1 John 4:14).

Piper claims that John couldn't have meant that Jesus appeased God's wrath for the sins of the entire world, because "propitiated sins cannot be punished....Therefore if Christ is the propitiation for all the sins of every individual in the world, they cannot be punished, and must be saved" (p.

16, prgh. 6). This, of course, is only logical to the Calvinistic mind, because only Calvinists believe that man plays no part in his salvation. All others realize, as Scripture repeatedly teaches, that in order for any person to experience the benefits of salvation that Christ purchased for him on the cross, he must repent and believe. Christ's atonement becomes effectual for people only when they meet His conditions.

We have already read where Paul wrote to the Romans that the adoption as sons *belonged* to the Jews (see Rom. 9:4). Using Piper's logic, we would have to conclude that because sonship belongs to every Jew, then every Jew will become God's child. But Paul made it clear that every Jew had to believe in Jesus if he was to actually possess his rightful adoption as a son. This principle is so abundantly plain in Scripture that we must wonder why Piper would even attempt to persuade us against it. Only those who have first bought into the Calvinistic doctrines of total depravity and irresistible grace can be fooled by Piper's conclusion that Christ's atonement was intended to save only some.

The Testimony of Jesus

Consider the following verses from John's Gospel, all of which prove that the benefits of Christ's atonement were not limited to any supposed group of unconditionally elected people, but were available to all who would believe. Except for the first quotation of John the Baptist, all the rest are from Jesus' own lips:

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away *the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29, emphasis added).

For God so loved the *world*, that He *gave* His only begotten Son, that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the *world*, *but that the world should be saved* through Him (John 3:16-17, emphasis added).

For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and *gives life* to the *world* (John 6:33, emphasis added)

I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if *anyone* eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give *for the life of the world* is My flesh (John 6:51, emphasis added).

I have come as light into the *world*, that *everyone* who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. And if *anyone* hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, *but to save the world* (John 12:46-47, emphasis added).

Jesus couldn't have made His message clearer. He gave His life for the world. Completely ignoring those passages, however, Piper isolates three passages from the Gospel of John in order to prove that "the death of Christ was designed for the salvation of God's people, not for every individual" (p. 15, prgh. 2).

Piper begins with John 10:15, in which Jesus says, "I lay down my life for the sheep." Piper claims this verse proves that Jesus only died for the ones God predestined for salvation, the "sheep." But are we to ignore or nullify the many just-quoted verses from John's Gospel and exalt this single verse? Or would it be better to believe everything that Jesus said and let scripture interpret scripture, so that we arrive at a biblically-balanced understanding?

Note that Jesus did not say in John 10:15 that He laid His life down *exclusively* for His sheep. If He did, then He contradicted Himself in the other passages I've just quoted from John's Gospel. In the passage Piper quotes, Jesus is only emphasizing His love for His followers. If Jesus said to you, "I died for you," would that prove that He died for you and no one else? Obviously not. Then why should we conclude, as Piper does (see p. 16-17), that when Scripture *sometimes* says that Jesus gave His life as a ransom for many, or for the church, that Jesus died *only* for the elect and not everyone? Consider Piper's logic in the following quotation from his booklet:

Similarly in Titus 2:14 Paul describes the purpose of Christ's death like this: "[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquities and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." If Paul were an Arminian would he not have said, "He gave himself to

redeem all men from iniquity and purify all men for himself”? (p. 17, prgh. 2)

Piper is again forcing his interpretation on a text. Why couldn't the “us” whom Jesus “gave himself for” be “those who have repented and believed”? Why must the “us” be “those individuals whom God has pre-selected for salvation”?

Once again, Piper selects a verse that seems to support his Calvinistic view and ignores all others that would contradict his view. Simply because Paul wrote in Titus 2:14 that Jesus gave Himself to “redeem *us*,” rather than to “redeem *all*,” that supposedly proves that Paul was a Calvinist who believed that Jesus only died for the people God predestined to be saved! Using the same flawed logic, what must Piper conclude from Paul's words in Galatians 4:4-5? There we read,

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, *in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law*, that we might receive the adoption as sons (emphasis added).

Note that Paul said God sent His Son to redeem “those who were under the Law.” That would mean all Jews and only Jews. Applying the same logic that Piper applies to interpreting Titus 2:14, we would have to conclude that Jesus *only* died for the Jews. And if we adopt Piper's previously-mentioned logic (i.e., that “propitiated sins cannot be punished”; see p. 16, prgh. 6), we would also have to conclude that since God sent His Son to redeem those under the Law, then all under the Law *must* be redeemed, because redeemed people can't be sent to hell. Thus all Jews are saved! Thus we see the glaring errors and inconsistency of Piper's pathetic methods of Bible interpretation.

Piper next pulls from their context verses 6, 9 and 19 of John 17, passages from Jesus' high priestly prayer, a prayer in which Jesus prays that His church might be one in order that the *world will believe that God sent His Son* (see John 17:21). By isolating specific requests Jesus made for His followers from within this prayer, Piper tries to prove that Jesus *didn't* die for the very world that He prays would believe in Him! Amazing!

Piper next quotes John 11:51-52, a passage which tells of how Caiaphas prophesied that “Jesus should die for the nation, and not the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.” Piper is truly on a search for needles in the haystack here. In the very same sentence which says that Jesus should die to gather into one the children of God scattered abroad (which Piper claims proves that Jesus didn’t die for everyone), we also read that Jesus should die for the *nation* of Israel! Piper consistently ignores the majority of scriptures that contradict his doctrine, and focuses only on those that seem to support his doctrine, even if he has to ignore the first half of a sentence and focus solely on the second half of a sentence.

Did Jesus die for everyone that everyone might be saved? What does Scripture say? Consider the following:

All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us *all* to fall on Him (Is. 53:6, emphasis added).

The same *all* who like sheep have gone astray are the same *all* whose iniquity fell upon Jesus. Calvinists would quickly endorse the first part of this verse as being supportive of their doctrine of total depravity. *All* are totally depraved, they would say. However, the Lord caused the iniquity of *all* those same totally depraved people to fall on Jesus. Why doesn’t Piper conclude from this verse that all will be saved, since the iniquity of *all* fell upon Jesus, and “propitiated sins cannot be punished” (*Piper*, p. 16, prgh. 6)?

For God has shut up *all* in disobedience that He might show mercy to *all* (Rom. 11:32, emphasis added).

The same *all* who are disobedient are the same *all* to whom God is showing saving mercy.

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for *all*, therefore *all* died; and He died for *all*, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf (2 Cor. 5:14-15, emphasis added).

Paul clearly states that Christ died for *all*, thus he concludes that “all died.” Notice the flow of his logic. The foundation of Paul’s logic is the truth that Christ died for all. From this, Paul concludes that “all died.” That is, the proof that all had died was the fact that Christ died for all. There can be no mistaking Paul here. Christ died for all who were spiritually dead, which is everyone. Paul then declares Christ’s intention in dying for all, that they should repent and “no longer live for themselves, but for Him.” Everyone *should* do that because Christ died for all, but not all do.

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a *ransom* for *all*, the testimony borne at the proper time (1 Tim. 2:5-6, emphasis added).

But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for *everyone* (Heb. 2:9, emphasis added).

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even *denying the Master who bought them*, bringing swift destruction upon themselves (2 Pet. 2:1, emphasis added).

The last-quoted scripture proves that Jesus even paid for the sins of false teachers who will spend eternity in hell. Jesus died for the sins of all people because God wants all people to be saved.

Piper implies that non-Calvinists believe that the cross was only “intended to give all men the opportunity to save themselves” (p. 17, prgh 1). That is, however, a very unfair accusation. No true Arminian believes such nonsense. No person can save himself. We can only respond to the gospel in faith, as God expects us to, using our God-given free wills under the influence of God’s drawing, in order to receive the salvation that Christ has purchased on the cross through His sufferings. That is a far cry from a person “saving himself.”

Piper’s Conclusion

Piper saves his best argument for last, which is nothing more than a twist on the argument he has used throughout his chapter on *Limited Atonement*. He correctly states that Arminians believe that (1) Christ died for all the sins of all men, and (2) the reason that not all men are saved is because they don't believe. He then asks his "clincher" question: "But is this unbelief not one of the sins for which Christ died?" (p. 18, prgh. 1). If the Arminian answers yes, then according to Piper, that would mean that everyone would be saved, because God would have nothing to hold against anyone, not even their unbelief.

Certainly unbelief is one of the sins for which Jesus died. But what Piper again misses is the obvious fact that what Jesus did for everyone only becomes effectual in the lives of individuals when individuals believe. This couldn't be more obvious in Scripture. God provided a way for every Israelite to escape His wrath upon Egypt, but the benefit of that salvation that God provided only became effectual in the lives of individual Israelites who believed God and applied the blood of the lamb to their lintels and door posts. God parted the Red Sea for every Israelite, but the benefit of that salvation only became effectual in the lives of individual Israelites when individuals trusted God and walked across on dry land. God provided manna for *all* the Israelites, but the benefit of that salvation only became effectual when individual Israelites believed God and gathered what they needed for a day. Many such biblical examples could be cited, all which foreshadowed the salvation that Christ would make available to all people in the world, a salvation that could be enjoyed by everyone who believes.

In conclusion, God is not a monster who creates people in order to take pleasure in torturing them forever! Rather, He is a Great Lover who yearns that all will be saved, and who suffered horribly on the cross to make salvation possible for all! Praise the Lord! All glory to Him!

May I now ask every reader: Did you begin reading this paper as a Calvinist? If so, do you still believe in the doctrines of Calvinism? If you do, then you must be able to refute every bit of logic and Scripture I've used in this paper by showing that what I've written contradicts Scripture and/or logic. I am still waiting for the very first refutation from a Calvinist. If you remain a Calvinist and are not able to refute what I've written, then you remain a Calvinist from some motivation other than obedience to

Christ and His Word. Is it because of pride that you are unable to admit that you have been wrong? Or is it because of fear of what other Calvinists might think if you defect from their doctrinal system? If either is true, then I must ask an even a more searching question: Is Jesus your Lord?